RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA

A LIBERATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

ASGHAR ALI ENGINEER

RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA

RELIGION IN SOUTH ASIA
A LIBERATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Edited by

Asghar Ali Engineer

HOPE INDIA

PREFACE

Though liberation theology has yet not struck its roots in South Asia, of late, however, South Asian theologians have also begun to appreciate it. We find Christians taking lead here. It is often said that it is rather difficult to develop liberation theology in Hinduism, the major religion in the region. However, some attempts are being made in Hinduism, too, in this direction. Some Buddhist monks and scholars have made pioneering attempt for developing liberation theology in Buddhism, too, though there is yet no strong tradition of liberative theology there. However, it must be said, Buddhism is most amenable to development of such a theology. It originated as a religion of protest.

Like Buddhism Islam, too, is quite amenable to liberation theology as there is strong emphasis on equality both social as well as economic. *'Adl* (justice) has central place in Islam. However, Islam got so feudalised over period of time that it nearly lost its liberative thrust. However, in their struggle against Shah, the theologians of Iran and some Islamic scholars again began to emphasise its liberative elements. Khomeini, though a conservative theologian, was also compelled to emphasise liberation in Islamic theology. Such was the pressure of events. However, soon after the revolution Islamic conservatism began to assert itself.

Sikhism, too, like Islam and Buddhism, is strong on liberative elements. It also originated as a protest movement and circumstances compelled it to remain anti-establishment throughout the Mughal period in India. But thereafter it be-

gan to coalesce with establishment and its strong liberative thrust came to be gradually eroded.

However, most of these religions are faced with great challenges today and among them is the challenge of exploitative capitalism. Capitalist consumerism, on one hand and its naked exploitation on the other, have had corrupting influences on religions too. And, therefore, now some young South Asian theologians and scholars are rethinking their respective theologies.

This volume is an attempt to project new liberative theological thinking among the theologians and scholars of major Indian and South Asian religions. We have tried to cover all major South Asian religions namely, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism.

It is by no means a pioneering attempt but it does try to put new theological thinking among these major religions from liberative angle in one volume. Though it has its own flaws for various reasons, it is hoped, it would be appreciated as there is growing need for such literature today. A good part of this work was published by Ajanta Publications, Delhi under the title *Religion and Liberation* (1989). The matter is, however, not only additioned but is also recast in the present volume. I am most grateful to the authors of the essays and the publishers for their help and cooperation in making the volume.

Asghar Ali Engineer

CONTENTS

Preface 5

1. Introduction
Asghar Ali Engineer 9

Part I : Hinduism

2. Liberative Undercurrents in Hindu Thought : A Preliminary Inquiry
M.C. Dinakaran 15

3. Hindu Liberation Theology : A Blueprint for Reform
Swami Agnivesh 39

Part II : Buddhism

4. The Buddhist Way to Liberation of Society
Kuliyapitiye Prananda 69

Part III : Christianity

5. Christianity in the Cause of Liberation
Errol D'Lima 105

6. Domination – Liberation : A New Approach
Enrique Dussel 125

Part IV : Islam

7. Religion, Ideology and Liberation Theology : An Islamic Point of View
Asghar Ali Engineer 155

8. Islam and the Challenge of Poverty
Asghar Ali Engineer 171

Part V : Sikhism

9. Sikhism and Human Liberation
Gurbhagat Singh 201

Part VI : Miscellaneous

10. Religion and Socialism
Frederic Hastings Smyth 217

11. Religion and the Left
Cornel West 229

1

INTRODUCTION

Asghar Ali Engineer

The most fundamental question that is agitating people's mind today is what is the relationship between religion and liberation? Is there any? Or none. The traditional left has been taking a view that there is no relationship between the two. Not only this but it maintains that there is inverse relationship between religiosity and liberation. More religious a person less liberated he is. This applies much more to the society, according to the traditional left. Greater the hold of religion over a society, much more difficult it would be to liberate it as religion is a powerful tool for vested interests and also religion tends to be a conservative ideology politically, socially as well as economically.

While one must concede there is some truth in this view of religion it must be said that it is not the whole truth. The traditional left view of religion is being subjected to criticism. In the post-colonial and post-industrial society new factors have emerged which require reassessment of the role religion can play in social transformation. Firstly, religion has been found to be much more tenacious than what it was thought to be. It showed no signs of withering away with the advancement of science and technology. It is, on the other hand, getting stronger and stronger not only in the backward countries of the third world but also in the advanced countries of the first world.

Secondly, religion is intricately connected with culture

and culture does not involve merely an ideological point of view as religion does but also the whole way of life. It is very difficult to relate the whole way of life mechanically to the rapid changes of science and technology. In fact in this rapidly changing scenario culture and religion provide stabilising element. These (i.e. religion and culture) become, in other words, a sort of shock absorbers. Also, science and technology are supposedly value-neutral and religion and culture are value-oriented. These values help control the monstrosity of modern technology and its destructive power. It is true human values in general (devoid of any religious affiliation) play the same role. But while religion appeals to a great mass of people, atheistic or rationalist humanism appeals to only a few people among the educated elite. Even Stalin had to use religious appeal during the Second World War in order to involve all sections of Russian society.

Thirdly, the vast urban conglomerations generated by modern industrial civilization produce intense feelings of alienation and meaninglessness. The upper classes in these societies indulge in hedonistic pleasures facilitated by consumerist capitalist culture, the lower classes toil for the pittance and get marginalised. Life for these sections of society becomes not only drudgery but also meaningless. However, none, neither the rich nor the poor, develop any organic roots in these vast urban conglomerations. Most of them live mercenary life. Such life inevitably leads to boredom and acute sense of alienation. Socialist societies, though somewhat qualitatively different, do not radically depart from this course. The sociological study of the Soviet society indicates that there is boredom and sense of anomic among the people. Religion, not only gives a set of values but also a meaning and sense of direction to the people. Today's Russia is even deriving a sense of identity from its religious history. It is celebrating 1000 years of Orthodox Christianity.

This is not to say that religion cannot be or has not been exploited by status quoits interests. It can undoubtedly be made an opiate for the people. Our whole history is full of such instances. It was not for nothing that Marx, a great social analyst with keen insight into human history, called religion, in one sense "opium of the people". More often than not religion has sided with vested interests and opposed any revolutionary change.

However, this is not the whole history of religion. Religion has also been associated with protest. In fact some religions like Buddhism, Christianity, Islam and Sikhism originated as protest movements. These religions had strong subversive elements in them until rendered harmless by the powerful establishments which sprung around them in due course of time. In fact all the Semitic prophetic religions like Judaism, Christianity and Islam had strong subversive elements and started as protest movements. Judaism originated as protest against slavery of Israeli nation at the hands of Pharoa, Christianity's main concern at the time of its origin was with the Palestinian serfs under the political domination of Byzantine Empire and Islam began as a movement for justice, equality and brotherhood. All the three religions were subversive of the prevailing status quo. Talking of Indian religious tradition, Buddhism and Jainism were protest against Vedic ritualism and Brahmin domination. In no way these religions, as primordial experience of their founders indicate, were supportive of repressive and exploitative structures of their time. In fact, they were strong protest movements against them. They brought about fundamental shift in the power structures and brought the weaker sections in the Quranic theology to the fore and made them the masters.

Thomas Munzer of medieval Germany whom Engels describes as 'communist priest' and 'priest of future' led the peasant struggle and his sermons were full of references to

the Bible, specially the concept of 'Kingdom of God' which he set out to establish here on this earth. The Qaramitas in Islamic history established communes and common kitchens and did away with private property except in weapons. True, both the experiments did not last longer but that was because of the power of vested interests rather than ideology of religion. All these religions (Buddhism, Christianity and Islam) were rendered harmless by ritualising them, thanks to the controllers of new establishments which came into existence around these religions. All that remained of these revolutionary protest movements which seriously concerned themselves with the oppressed were a set of rituals to be dutifully performed to achieve 'salvation'.

Religion thus has to be seen in proper perspective. Mechanical approach would not do. What is required is a serious analysis of the situation. One has to raise a serious question whether religion can inspire those waging people's struggles in South Asia? And if so, how? The following essays propose to answer this question, albeit briefly.

PART ONE

HINDUISM

2

LIBERATIVE UNDERCURRENTS IN HINDU THOUGHT : A PRELIMINARY INQUIRY

M.C. Dinakaran

I

It has been remarked often as incredible the survival of India as a nation state over five decades after the end of colonial rule. Cassandras cited the multiplicity of religions, castes, subnationalities and languages present in a land-mass of continental dimensions as factors contributing towards the eventual breakdown of administration and the balkanization of the country. This was proved wrong: today India has her place in the sun and the concept of a sovereign Republic has gained acceptance among the near billion strong population of the truncated subcontinent.

While accepting this, one need not feel complacent about the real, live threats which are still prevalent in the country. It is the biggest tragedy of our contemporary history that decades of adult franchise, democratic experiments and industrialization could not succeed in eradicating the twin evils of fundamentalism and sectarianism. It can even be observed that the politicization of the population without adequate growth in economic and ecological welfare has contributed to the growth of forces and apparatuses of religious reaction.

While a host of factors had jointly contributed to the growth of communal and sectarian forces, one major cause was the failure of the Left to tackle the growth of various fun-

damentalisms. This was partly due to the erroneous and self-defeating approaches leaders of the communist and socialist parties took while grappling with the deep religiosities of the Indian people. The usual strategy of the Left was to consider religion as the natural product of the false consciousness of people. As a consequence, matters pertaining to religion were given very little emphasis and this has (arguably) contributed to the stunted growth of the organized Left in the heartland of India.

The damage such an approach wrecked became obvious as the disgruntled masses refuge under the umbrella of right reactionaries and religious fundamentalists. These parties strived to consolidate masses under their respective symbolisms, ethos and platforms and thus succeeded in offering attractive and simplistic solutions to problems of enormous complexity. The net effect of this is seen in the tragic happenings of Punjab, the horrible massacres of U.P. and the precarious communal situations in many towns all over the country.

The inadequacy of orthodox Marxist and Socialist ideologies to grapple with problems of culture and tradition had been deeply felt by non-dogmatic intellectuals and activists all over the world. It is from such a concern that various liberation theologies sprung up in Latin America and Philippines to catch the imagination of the oppressed millions. The parallel efforts in Islam to go to the roots and historically renew the Prophet's philosophy was also seen in countries like Iran. What this has achieved is of tremendous import to contemporary world history. By reading the texts within a liberative matrix the theologians attempted to conscientise the oppressed as a first step towards breaking the chains of ignorance, misery and heartless exploitation. The victory of the Sandinist's forces at the beginning of this decade in Nicaragua was the direct outcome of efforts put in by hundreds of theologians, over decades, to conscientise the oppressed there.

The success of the Sandinist revolution which has underscored the congruence of true religion with revolution has helped the orthodox Left in reappraising the role of religion in neo-colonial societies. Simultaneously the orthodox churches have also begun to accept the reality as it exists, and have grudgingly given a little room for the radical priests to operate within the rigid structures of official religion.

While the dialogue between the Marxists and the priests have begun to take place within the Semitic religions, in India such a discourse seems to have never taken off. The reasons for this are manifold; the most important being the total absence of an official church and a network of clerics in Hinduism, which cannot be called a religion in Semitic sense. Hinduism is a label of convenience which can include God-denying Charvakas and world-denying Vedantins. In the plethora of cosmologies and theologies which abound, it is very difficult for any orthodox Marxist to delineate any single particular stream of thought as the dominant one and intelligently respond to it.

At the same time the all inclusive spirit that the seers had shown while accommodating dissenting tendencies have always encouraged serious practitioners of the religion to accept the Marxist world-view as a heterodex perspective. The natural consequence was an absence of intelligent dialogue at the best and rank indifference at the worst.

Lately, however, the trend seems to be getting reversed. The Indian State has consciously tried to build up over the last over five decades the Brahmanic Darsanas which accept the sanctity of Vedas as the legitimate Hinduism. As a corollary the modern Hindu accepts the *Upanishads* and *Brahma Sutras* and the theology of *Advaita Vedanta* as synonymous with Hinduism. The heterodex sects and popular movements which were essentially avaidic and anti-Brahmanical get little mention in officially prepared textbooks.

Such a revival of State-sponsored religion has, however, made it easier for potential liberation theologists of Hinduism to offer an alternate and 'radical' (in the etymological sense : going to the roots) interpretation of classical Hinduism. In fact, from Swami Dayanand and Swami Vivekananda to Justice Ranade and Mahatma Gandhi attempts were made for such a revaluation but it is only in the eighties that a serious rereading of the ancient scriptures were undertaken in right earnest. Swami Agnivesh and his dedicated band of Sannyasis are the most visible manifestation of this trend, but it would be possible, as time passes, to discover new and refreshing theologies emerging in order to offer a democratic and liberating alternative to the stifling ethos of classical theology.

It is in this background that this article is written. It tries to gauge the power of liberating tendencies in ancient Hindu texts. It also tries to recount the efforts of modern thinkers like Vivekananda and Gandhi who drew a lot of inspiration from the religious texts in their attempts to mobilize and rally the masses against colonial tyranny.

II

The Vedas are the most ancient and the most misunderstood of all the scriptures. Critics of Hinduism have traced to the Vedas the source of all social ills that plague religion nowadays. Terms such as *Varanashrama, Yajna* and *Arya* have all along attracted special criticism from the Left and Liberal thinkers as the fountainhead of caste, ritualism and xenophobia prevalent among the Hindus. However, a close reading of the Vedas would reveal that the original meanings inherent in the Vedas are radically different from the meanings they acquired as time progressed and society grew complex.

The truths were heard by the inner ear and seen by the

inner eye of the *rishis*; hence the Vedas are called *apaureshaya* (not written by man), or *Sruti*: that which is heard. The Vedas normally deal with four subjects: *Vijnana* (scientific knowledge); *Karma* (common activity); *Upasana* (behaviour towards liberation) and *Jnana* (spiritual knowledge). Vedic sages did not deny the world: no world weariness is in evidence in the Vedas. The sages are positive in their acceptance of life and death. They embraced the value of truth, goodness, beauty and of Eternal Law, *Rita*.

The *Rishis* felt the living presence of the Divine in the entire physical universe. They loved life as well as God, and, placing themselves under the discipline of *Satya*, *Rita* and *Tapas* (Truth, the Eternal law and Penance) they led a life of utter dedication and consecration to the divine.

Rita was the period of classical primitive communism of the Indo-Aryan tribes. It was pre-vedic and we find many nostalgic references to it in Vedic literature as a bygone age in which justice, truth and brotherhood ruled supreme. In *Rita* society the tribe worked together, labour was collective and the produce of labour was shared more or less equally by all.

According to this outlook, everything in the world behaved according to its nature, called *Rita*. The collectivist, egalitarian, fraternal life of that society was its nature, its *Rita*. *Varuna*, the protector of *Rita* was the personification of virtue, justice and morality.

Rita in its cosmic sense stands for the Law of Nature which imposes order and symmetry on chaos and creates aesthetic form or beauty.

Rita in its social sense is the fundamental Moral law which imposes order and symmetry on the life and character of man and produces goodness. *Rita* demands championship of good against evil – the battle of *Dharma*.[1]

Satya has two aspects: first, it is integrity; secondly it is

Sat, or the ultimate reality to be realized through inner vision. Behaviour was found to conform or not to conform to the Vedic values. Hence it falls into two conflicting categories: *Satya* and *Asatva* (truth and untruth) and *Rita* and *Arita* (justice and injustice).[2]

The Vedas claim there is one Supreme Reality and many ways to approach it. The Divine can be realized not only through an expansion of consciousness but can be met by each individual soul in itself, for the individual and the universal are essentially the same.

It is by self-giving or sacrifice (*yajna*) that the Supreme *Purusha* made the creation of this world. By self-giving man can also participate and earn the help of Gods to recreate himself in the life of the supreme spirit. This is the true inner sacrifice of which the outer is only a symbol. The self-offering of the aspirant makes it possible for the gods to be born in him and increase their own substance in him, thereby helping man to reach his own inner heights. This inner sacrifice is thus the way to realize the supreme ideal of manifesting the divine in man.

There was a theory in puranic times that the Shudra could not be permitted to hear the Vedas. But in the Vedas it is made only clear that the Veda was preached to one and all.[3] The working class was not to be denigrated because the people of Vedic times worked; they sowed and reaped. But all this was done in a spirit of reverence. To them cultivation was an act of worship. Labour did not render the earth sterile, much less bring ruin upon her. Labour let the earth be earth in the fullest sense of the word. In the process humans became even more human. To relate them to nature meant adhering to *Rita*. In and through humans the cosmic *Rita* becomes ethical behaviour.[4]

The Vedic life anticipated Marx in that nature is man's material and spiritual inorganic body. Nature is not what

humans have but what they are. What, in the case of Marx, was but an abstract philosophical truth was for the Vedic people something lived and experienced.

III

Swami Agnivesh has given a signal contribution in unearthing the true liberative message of the Vedas. In a paper entitled, 'Religion and Social Liberation : An Indian Perspective', Swami Agnivesh underlines the revolutionary impulses of religion in its "pristine pure and formative stages".[5] The early religious teachers were far from offering mental opium to the common people but "roused them from their long stupor and state of downright immorality, fear and lasciviousness – into that of spiritual wakefulness, making them respond in a more positive way to higher values of life".

Swami Agnivesh draws a clear line between true religion and blind faith, superstition and ritualism which pose as true religion. He regrets to find that many well-meaning Marxists cannot as yet understand this distinction. He says, "to open up possibilities of real revolutionary advance in society, bridges of understanding and cooperation have to be built between Marxism and Religion". The exploiting classes take cover under religion only to oppose Religion. Hence the conflict between Marxism and Religion, the resultant of "the machinations of the exploiting classes and intellectuals serving them who in the name of religion oppose revolution and revolutionary transformation of society."[6]

It is not possible to attain truth within, without simultaneously fighting the forces of untruth outside. "Therefore", affirms Swami Agnivesh, "the fight against Untruth, Unfreedom and Unjust Social Order become part and parcel of one's spiritual pursuit." The Vedas do not depend on each individual's goodness for the creation of a Just, Truthful, Non-violent

society. They emphasize the need for structural changes and a perpetual class struggle to stamp out the evil of accumulation and inequity.

Swami Agnivesh enumerates the following as cardinal principles of a Vedic Society :

(1) No Birth Right : No individual can claim any special right or privilege in society because of his/her birth in a certain family. Right of inheritance (of means of production and distribution, etc.) is therefore ruled out; similarly caste distinctions based on birth are anathema to the Vedic social order.[7]

(2) *Varna Ashram* : The society will regulate an individual's life through four *varnas* (chosen path of a mission) and four *Ashramas* (division of life into stages leading to sublimation of an individual self into universal family). The entire educational system is geared to the task of producing missionaries as opposed to mercenaries. Every child has to choose one of the three missions, viz., mission to fight against forces of ignorance, *Ajnan* : Brahman; mission to fight against the forces of injustice, *Anyaya* : Kshatriya; mission to fight against the forces of inadequacy, *abhava* : Vaishya. Only a person failing to qualify for any of these missions is designated Shudra and is called upon to serve one of these like an apprentice. (There is nothing menial or derogatory in the word Shudra : *Janmana jayatte Shudra, Karman Dwija uchyate,* by birth everyone is born a Shudra; it is only after qualifying for a certain discipline that one becomes Brahman etc.) Even this classification was not rigid promotion to higher *Varna* as an incentive and demotion to lower *Varna* as punishment keeps the society in ferment. Thus we see that *Varna* means a mission and has nothing to do with colour or caste or racial superiority.

Private ownership of means of production and distribution is incompatible with the Vedic *Varna* Ashrama system. A person entitled to a status called on his/her Action, Talent and Aptitude (*Guna, Karma, and Swabhava*). Instead of private ownership the Vedas prescribe a collective form of living and sharing. The social system cannot depend on an individual's sense of charity and piety. It has to be so structured that equality of opportunity and common ownership of means of production and distribution become hallmarks of an egalitarian society. There is constant exhortations to toiling masses, the Aryans, to unite and fight against the Dasyus (*Akarmah Dasyu* : one who does not labour is a robber).

The true Vedic message is quite different from what is purveyed by the religious and political establishments. Vedas are world affirming and revolutionary and take clear cut positions on socio-political matters : supporting the working class against the leisure class; rallying against the concept of private property; and highlighting the imperative of organized action in favour of a just order, the *Rita*. It is this emphasis of Vedas, on Truth (*Satya*) and Justice (*Rita*), which makes them potentially revolutionary texts in our dishonest and unjust social structures.

IV

As stated above, the ruling classes have succeeded in installing a vulgarized form of *Vedanta* as the mainstream philosophy of Hinduism. The officially sponsored view endorsed the European understanding of Indian philosophies : it equates Brahmanism with Hinduism. Under such a perception Hinduism boils down to a world-denying, mystical bunch of thoughts which strives to rationalize all inequities and exploitations here and now under the pretext that the world being an illusion (*Maya*) whatever going on here also are illusions.

That those who man the modern Indian State finds it eminently desirable to revive a mystical and reified doctrine to act as the base of a homogenised Hindu religion is no secret. However, *Vedanta* is not unambiguous in endorsing the ruling class positions. It becomes evident while going through the texts of *Vedanta*, particularly the more popular *Bhagavad Gita* and the *Upanishads* that along with discourses which may point towards such a world denying hypotheses, there also lie messages which logically point towards the opposite direction.

The perception that action now needs greater knowledge of both the world and the self will be authentic only if the world and the existence in it are real. World affirmation and world denial depend respectively on the acceptance or the rejection of becoming as an authentic mode of Reality. Therefore, as Krishna Chaitanya explains in his monumental study of the *Mahabharata*, neither simple polytheism nor simple transcendentalism can explain God functioning as the ground of both essence and existence.[9]

Gita says : Action is born from Brahman, Brahman from the Imperishable; therefore Brahman resides in altruistic action.[10] Vyasa brings God here and now by introducing the concept of Supreme Person (*Purushottama*). He quietly eases out the old Brahman (of the other world, para) by making the new Brahman the source of action on the one hand, and the derivative of the Supreme Person on the other hand. Brahman is derived from the Supreme Person. The new intermediary Brahman is not allowed to enjoy even this pointless intermediate role for long; the concept is made to become further blurred and get lost. "Great nature is my womb. I seed it with the germ and from it are born all things."[11] The old Brahman which blocked the world from appearing has been ejected from the scene completely and we now only have the divine intentionality, the Supreme Person, and Nature, his instru-

mentality.

While official Hinduism projects the world-denying side of *Vedanta,* it also strives to distort the original meanings of texts. The most distorted concept is *Yajna,* which is assumed to be ritual sacrifice. Vyasa, the author of *Gita,* has unequivocally made it clear that *Yajna* means altruistic action.

Yoga Vasishtam, another treatise of *Vedanta* occupying as an honoured position as *Gita* in scholarly circles, says : "Individuality and action are not two things. The individual is action and action is individuality." This is in marked contrast to the missionaries of Hindu revivalism who attempt to tie down a population struggling against all odds in a maze of superstition, fatalism and defeatism.

Yajna means sacrifice in the higher sense, the self giving of itself, or even itself for purposes vaster than its own. The concept of *Karma* is purified of its association with fundamentalist magic to make it as the action of man and to escalate it as *yajna,* sacrificial action in the higher sense.

When man undertakes work as sacrifice with concern for others, and the gods help the fruition of such work there is a reciprocity which is auspicious not only for man but also for the gods. "The world cannot survive if every man is predatory, it flourishes if everyone becomes altruistic".[12]

In the movement from *artha* to *kama* to *dharma* we move from lack of concern to concern and from more attachment to less. The emancipated and the evolved individual considers the whole world as himself. The *Gita* defines him as *sarvabhutahiterarata* – concerned in the well-being of all creatures. And Krishna enjoins on all that they should work for the weal of the world (*loka samgraha*).[13]

The man who has attained illumination and is not attached to the fruits of action must work for the weal of the world, with no less enthusiasm than that shown by people in their work for personal advantage. In the (intense) manner he

unenlightened act from attachment to their work (for personal ends) so should the enlightened also act, but without attachment, for *loka samgraha* – welfare of the world".

Gita also exhorts man to work towards *Rajyam Samruddham* which means the Opulent Realm. This is akin to the Kingdom of God found in Semitic religions and is aimed at enabling men to work towards a finer order of human society while having a change of state within themselves.

Upanishads also convey the same message. The first verse of *Isavasya Upanishad* states : "By the Lord pervaded must all this be – whatever moving there is, is the moving world." A life which accepts the world as Brahman's self-expression will be one of sacrifice. In it there is no room for greed, delusion or conflict. That is why the *Upanishad* says : With that renounced thou mayest enjoy – covet not the wealth of anyone at all". *Kathopanishad* also warns against hankering after wealth.[14] The *Brihadaranyaka* is even more emphatic on this point when it says : "Of immortality, however, there is no hope through wealth".[15]

Vedanta tries to raise the human self to the pinnacle of divine glory. It does not attempt to, as the critics allege, and debase the divine by bringing it to the human level. In the medieval literature of the Bhakti School this notion was used to justify social equality.

The Bhakti movement was deeply humanist and was rooted in *Vedanta*. Renowned saints were inspired by it, they denounced the cruel and heartless orthodoxy of the Brahman priesthood; they were persecuted and ostracized for freely mixing with Shudras and untouchables and preaching that they should be given a humane treatment.

The Bhakti saints accepted the theory of the four *varnas* emanating from four different limbs of Brahma. They utilized this concept to prove that all of them had the same atma and were children of the same Supreme Creator.

Chaitanya Mahaprabhu of Bengal taught that because men are united in love of God and therefore to each other, there should be no distinction between them. Thus Chaitanya became an opponent of caste and would not allow it among his followers. Kabir would accept only his inner vision and experiences. Neither Vedas nor Koran would he permit to compel him. God is to be seen and experienced directly and immediately. Through love and joy one experiences, the ultimate who is everywhere. Disputation, theorizing and argumentation will neither save nor lead one to God. Instead "...he who has seen the radiance of love, he is saved." Kabir found all rituals hollow in content : "One only needs to look within to discover him. Hari is in the East : Allah is in the West. Look with your heart, for there you will find both Karim and Ram".

Kabir, like Chaitanya, recognized no caste distinctions among his followers, for all are divine and cannot be reduced to a caste. "All the men and women of the world are his living forms".

Bhakti movement worked within the parameter of conventional theology to bring dignity to the oppressed masses who were all along subjugated by many layers of exploitative apparatuses. One leading stream of this movement, that of Guru Nanak, gave birth to the dynamic religion of the Sikhs; an attempt to synthesize the best of Hinduism with the best of Islam.

V

The colonial rule provoked many different responses in the Hindu mind. The most visible of these were the great reformist movements initiated by Raja Ram Mohan Roy and Swami Dayanand Saraswati. While the aim of both these movements was to rediscover the lost religiosity of the old religion in

terms of categories brought into the subcontinent by the practitioners of Islamic and Protestant civilizations, it was Swami Vivekananda who went deep into the scriptures to come up with the liberative message of Hindu texts. This last section is devoted to understand the role played by Swami Vivekananda and Mahatma Gandhi in rousing a population by guiding them to draw inspiration from their own well-springs of traditions.

Swami Vivekananda characterized the rule of capitalists as the rule of Vaishyas, the third *Varna*. Before this, society had passed through rule by priests (Brahman), and the military (Kashatriya). "When the priest rules", Swami Vivekananda says, "there is a tremendous exclusiveness on hereditary grounds; ... none but they have the right to impart that knowledge". The Kshatriya rule is tyrannical and cruel. The rule by the commercial class is awful in its silent crushing and blood-sucking power. Culture begins to decay during this period.

"Yet a time will come", prophesies Swami Vivekananda, "when there will be the rising of the Shudra clan, with their Shudrahood, that is to say, not like that as at present when the Shudras are becoming great by acquiring the characteristic qualities of the Vaishya or the Kshatriya, but a time will come when the Shudras of every country will gain absolute supremacy in every society".

Swami Vivekananda cites the distribution of physical comforts as the main advantage of the Shudra (labourer) rule. He was exposed to the merciless nature of corporate capitalism during his tips to the West. Under capitalism, he noted, "machines are making things cheap, making for progress and evolution, but millions are crushed, that one may become rich; while one becomes rich, thousands at the same time become poorer and poorer and whole masses of human beings are made slaves". He comes to the conclusion : "The present

mercantile civilization must die, with all its pretensions and humbug."

With astonishing precision Swami Vivekananda could predict, "The next great upheaval which is to bring about a new epoch will come from Russia or China. I can't quite see which, but it will be either Russia or China".

Vivekananda endorses socialism at a time when the first socialists were just being noticed in Europe. "I am a socialist", he said, "not because I think it is a perfect system, but half a loaf is better than no bread." He appreciated the positive features of Brahman, Kshatriya and Vaishya rajs.

But he is sceptical of the feasibility of a system where the knowledge of the priest, the culture of the military, the distributive spirit of the commercial and the equality of the last could be combined. "But is it possible?" he asks, "yet the first three have had their day. Now is the time for the last – they must have it – none can resist it".

Though Swami Vivekananda preached *Advaita* akin to Shankara's concept of monism he was devastating in his criticism of the priestly class. "Monks and Sannyasins and Brahmans of a certain type have brought the country into ruin." He castigates, "They will take gifts from the people and at the same time cry, don't touch me!". He points out the paradox of a million Sadhus and Brahmans sucking blood out of the poor people where millions live on the flower of the Mohua plant – "is that a country of hell?" "Is that a religion of the devil's dance?"

Vivekananda considered the Mohammedan conquest of India as a salvation to the downtrodden, to the poor. Debunking the theory of forcible conversion, he says "that is why one-fifty of our people have become Mohammedans. It is not sword that did it all. It would be the height of madness to think it was all the work of sword and fire".

Vivekananda terms the neglect of the masses by the an-

glicized elite as a great national sin. "They pay for our education, they build our temples, but in return they get kicks. They are practically our slaves". Vivekananda had enormous faith in the masses. "The upper classes are physically and morally dead", he said, "now life could only be poured into the veins of the higher classes by a great movement of the lower class reaching to the democracy."

Vivekananda, elaborating the teachings of his spiritual Guru, Ramakrishna, propounded a vigorous social philosophy of fearlessness (*abhaya*), egalitarianism, individualism, religious pluralism and a synthesis of nativistic catholicity with the West. He upheld the ideal of God being one in many and Absolute as well as Merciful. Idol, Cross and Crescent are means to realize that Absolute. There is no one rigid path to realize unity in divinity. Vivekananda wanted women to have equal rights : women have a right to education, to the knowledge of *Vedanta* and to *Sannyasa*.

Vivekananda's message electrified the minds of the Hindu youth and radicalized the middle classes of Bengal. The revolutionary interpretation he gave to traditional texts contributed to the rise of national consciousness among the masses and "*bhadralok*" of Bengal. That Bengal led the national movement is a part of our history now. Further, Vivekananda built the psychological foundation for the left movements which took off from the legacy of irreverence and open thinking bequeathed by this outspoken monk of modern Hinduism.

Mahatma Gandhi caught the imagination of the Indian masses as no one had ever before. Gandhiji awakened the sleeping giant that was India and succeeded in throwing out the colonial masters who were economically, politically and culturally subjugating the population. The true import of the Gandhian intervention in India's contemporary history can be gauged only if one recognizes the shocking levels of apathy

and indifference with which tens of crores of Indians put up with less than a lakh of British rulers.

Gandhiji was a Vaishya by birth, thus two times removed from the authorized level for interpreting the scriptures, the Brahminical. No wonder, the unorthodox definitions he gave to crucial concepts of Hinduism like *Karma, Yajna, Dharma, Varna* etc., drew flak from the Sanatanis. While his passion for the eradication of untouchability alienated the orthodoxy, his espousal of *Varnashramadharma* did not impress the elite among the depressed classes. He proudly declared himself a Sanatani, but differed from the caste Hindu leadership on many important matters: on caste Hindu perception vis-à-vis Muslims, on cow slaughter, and the way the free India should be governed. The antipathy this generated culminated in the shooting down of the Mahatma by a "nationalist" Hindu.

In Gandhian spirituality we find politics and religion blend to become an integral approach to living and evil has to be fought both at the social and psychological levels. Gandhi imparted to Swaraj dimensions hitherto not given even by stalwarts like Tilak. The concept of Swaraj which comprised only notions of political and national independence started acquiring social, economic and spiritual dimensions under Gandhi. The highest meaning of Swaraj would be *moksha,* which Gandhi believed is the highest goal any man can aspire for. *Moksha,* according to Gandhi, was collective; concretely historical, political and social liberation.

The freedom struggle led by Gandhi was a nationalist – democratic mass upsurge avowedly anti-imperialist. The contradictions presenting the struggle for national liberation were reflections of the competing class and regional interests present in the movement. *Sarvodaya* as an ideology was still effectively anti-bourgeois. It gave a dream to India's multitudes : a new heaven and new earth free of injustice.

Gandhi did not stop at the restriction of accumulating

private property nor at the equitable distribution of surpluses. He unequivocally opposed private property and pointed towards the inevitability of socialization of wealth. Sarvodaya is a home-grown variant of peasant socialisms once popular in Europe. Hence it is confusing for anyone to observe a new variety of Gandhism being synthetically raised by the government which aims to mix up the goals of agrarian socialism with the imperatives of a welfare state. Sarvodaya aims at the eradication of all exploitation, caste and class, and would not stop before wealth is socialized and property nationalized. To achieve this Gandhi offered these means : the establishment of a non-violent state, a legally run trusteeship and facilities given to the masses to employ struggles incorporating non-cooperation, disobeyance of laws, militant non-violent struggle etc.. It is a pity that those people who see in Gandhism the most evolved form of bourgeois liberalism direct their criticisms against these eminently realistic attempts to place power right at the grassroots level.

Gandhi subjugated his faith to the demands of reason. He would accept no idea, however well-established and sacred, unless it appealed to his reason. He did it by rephrasing his faith in rational terms. He turned faith into what he called a workable assumption.[16] In this manner he thought faith would help to correct the faults of reason and reason would help to correct the faults of faith. "I exercise my judgement about every scripture, including the *Gita*", said Gandhi, "I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason". He also viewed the received texts with caution : they "suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly, they come through a human prophet and then through the commentaries of interpreters".

To Gandhi not only did colonial capitalism represent a 'grand regression' in Indian history, but he also rejected the notion that the next state of development in India must be

capitalist modernization (westernization). He was asserting that it was possible, through human praxis, to evolve a path of development which would sidestep capitalism, in spite of the introduction of capitalist institutions into India during the colonial period.

The Gandhian vision of a 'new society' may be described as a decentralized system of village communes – self-governing, self-sustaining-interlinked with each other but autonomous, and with a weak central state apparatus whose functions would be residual. The governing norms in these villages Gandhi envisaged as love and co-operation, and not competitive acquisitiveness. The Gandhian conception is not based on the multiplicity of wants and their satiation but a conception of 'self-transcendence' in which perfected individuals have only basic needs. For Gandhi societies do not have to pass through the tunnel of capitalism – a system which energizes avarice and competitiveness in each of us, so that each is set against everyone else.

On economic life, Gandhi argued that "if India is to attain true freedom ... then sooner or later the fact must be recognized that people will have to live in villages, not in towns."[17] But Gandhi did not want to accept today's villages which though alienated regimes, stand stagnant, depraved, corrupted and emaciated. He had a different village in mind beneath the outer encrustations, which hid the indomitable spirit and goodness of the peasantry. In his own words, "the ideal village will contain intelligent human beings. They will not live in dirt and darkness as animals. Men and women will be free and able to hold their own against any one in the world. There will be neither plague, nor cholera, nor small-pox; no one will be idle, no one will wallow in luxury. Everyone will have to contribute his quota of manual labour... It is possible to envisage railways, posts and telegraph... and the like ..."[18]

To Gandhi not only was external colonialism the enemy of the rural poor, but also the internal colonialism of a market system which set cities against the villages – a point quite inevitably grasped by Mao, too, in China, which is the only other mass society comparable with India. Gandhi said on this internal colonialism : "The cities with their insolent torts are constant menace to the life and liberty of the villages ... villages are being exploited and drained by the cities."[19] Visionary and philosophic is his famous description of the overall organization of society :

> In this structure composed of innumerable villages there will be ever widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual always ready to perish for the one life composed of individuals, never aggressive in their arrogance, but ever humble, sharing the majority of the oceanic circle of which they are integral units. Therefore the outermost circumference will not wield power to crush the inner circle, but will give strength to all within and derive its own strength from it. ... No one will be first, and none the last.[20]

Madan Handa describes the Gandhian outlook in relation to the dichotomy between the ideal and the material as follows: With the notable exception of Gandhi's own idealized version of India's past the Gandhian perspective might perhaps be described as dialectical human realism.[21] Philosophically, Gandhi maintained he was within the Indian Vedantic tradition, a monistic system of thought which holds "transcendent reality" – transcendent beyond mind and matter – as the prime cause. [22] Vedantic thought accepts the dialectics of mind and matter more precisely of the manifest and non-manifest – in all forms of life, and holds that this dialectic is resolved only through transcendence; that is by going beyond the present determined and determining existence. This tran-

scendence is held to lead to continuous evolution. It is agreeable that Hegelian idealism may itself be interpreted as a particular variant of vedantic thought.

Both Marxists ar.d Vedantists recognize that the principle of equality, or unity, of mankind is not realized in the world as it exists. Both define a final state, a "human state" (Marx) or a 'divine state' (Vedantist); and both suggest a path of development through 'praxis', which can transcend the present limits of existence and bring us to a higher state of life. Marx sees the process of transcendence being carried through a class, as a social process. Vedantic thought views transcendence as a process of individual perfection. Gandhi was in the mainstream of Vedantic philosophy, but with a primary difference. Gandhi was not just a speculative philosopher, a meditative saint seeking individual perfection. He was an activist, a man of action, a *Karma Yogi* who sought individual perfection through service to mankind, accepted society as his field of action and sought a new social organization for a new India.

That the goal of Gandhi differed markedly from the practice of Gandhians was another irony of our contemporary society. The developmental policies initiated by Gandhi's favourite Congressman, Jawaharlal Nehru had little to do with Gandhian praxis. On the political plane the ideal of 'gram swaraj' never was given a good try by successive governments, the possible exception being the devolution of state power attempted by the Karnataka government and the West Bengal government.

The breathtaking pace at which industrial capitalism is growing in the present times has thrown up serious challenges for the sustenance and furthering of individual freedom. The mercenary philosophy which guides monopoly capitalism has percolated down to all realms of social behaviour and everything including culture is getting converted

into commodities for unequal exchange. The acquisitive drive of the middle classes has generated a development policy aimed at directing investment towards the production and marketing of luxury goods at the expense of wage goods which are desperately needed by the masses. The planning process itself has turned its emphasis from pubic sector to privatization and the country today witnesses the phenomena of a dual society where an affluent top decile of the population lords over the wretched rest.

The tensions such a scenario throws up included both sporadic resistance offered by the rural landless to continuing oppression as well as the mobilization of the urban poor on communal lines by vested interests. In a social set up where uncertainties loom large on each day of one's existence religion offers a tempting detraction as well as a means for recovering one's lost self-esteem. The proliferation of *Bhajan Mandalis* and *Satsangs*, financed often by local traders and run by hoodlums, in our suburban milieus is due to the yearning the rootless migrant has for some symbols of cultural support.

The classic left formulation that there is an ontological incompatibility between Religion and socialism has led the progressive movements to disregard and ignore the role religion plays in moulding the consciousness of people and to reinforce the imperialist campaign that there does exist such an incompatibility. The objective for any democratic movement should be to include believers in the process of building a society of justice and fraternity. The poor turn to religion to remain organized, articulate, conscious and active. If one were to ask a farmer, a worker, or a domestic servant what concept he had of the world, he would surely couch his reply in religious terms. The most elementary concept that the oppressed people have of the world is a religious one. The traditions that we have inherited contain enough resources to enable the oppressed break their shackles. Religion is too important a

subject to be left solely in the hands of the reactionaries. Hinduism has to take a qualitative leap to an ethical religiosity that can generate universal love and commitment while preserving on a higher level what is genuinely humanizing in cosmic religiosity.

NOTES

1. *Atharva Veda* XII 1.1.
2. *Rg Veda* VI 50.2.
3. *Yajur Veda* 26.2 says : "So may I speak the sacred word to the masses of people – to the Brahmana and the *Rajasya* (Kshatriya), to the Shudra and the Vaisya, to our men and to the stranger". Also, as against the later devaluation of Shudras as a caste Vedas speak of the field labourer as 'kavi', creative worker (*Rg Veda* X 90.12) the term for the Vedic poet. Similarly, the chariot-maker has been described as 'manishin' wise man (*Atharva Veda* III 5-6), another term for the Vedic seer.
4. Fr. S. Kappen, "The Vedic World view and the Challenge of Ecological Liberation", *Pipal Tree*, Bangalore, 1987.
5. Swami Agnivesh, "Religion and Social Liberation : An Indian Perspective", *Pipal Tree*, Bangalore, 1987.
6. Ibid.
7. *Yajur Veda*, Ch. 40.
8. *Rg Veda* 10-22-8.
9. Krishna Chaitanya, *Mahabharta, A literary study*, Chapter X. Clarion Books, Delhi, 1985.
10. *Gita* III.15.
11. *Gita* XIV-3.
12. Krishna Chaitanya, *Mahabharata*, Ch. XI.
13. *Gita* III. 20.
14. *Kathopanishad* 1-27.
15. *Brihadaranyaka* Upanishad 4-53.
16. T.K. Mahadevan, Gandhi, "A Modernist Heresy", in *Indian Thought – An Introduction*, Ed. Donald. H. Bishop, Wiley Eastern, Delhi.

17. Pyare Lal, *Mahatma Gandhi : The Last Phase*, Navjivan, Ahmeda-bad, 1958 p. 544.
18. Ibid., p. 545.
19. Ibid., p. 550.
20. Ibid., p. 580.
21. Madan Handa, "The Elements of a Gandhian Social Theory", essay from *In Theory and Practice : Essays on the politics of Jayaprakash Narayan*, ed. David Selbourn.
22. See S. Radhakrishanan and C. Moore (ed.), *A Source Book of Indian Philosophy*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1957.

REFERENCES

1. Vishwanath Prasad Varma, *Studies in Hindu Political Thought and its Metaphysical Foundations*, Motilal Banarsidas, Delhi.
2. S.G. Sardesai, *Progress and Conservatism in Ancient India*, Peoples Publishing House, New Delhi.
3. I.C. Sharma, Stanley M. Daugert, *Ethical Philosophies of India*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd.
4. Nataraja Guru, Nitya Chaitanya Yati, *The Bhagavad Gita*. Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi.
5. Swami Agnivesh, *Religion, Revolution and Marxism*, Pamphlet.

3

HINDU LIBERATION THEOLOGY : A BLUE-PRINT FOR REFORM

Swami Agnivesh

The Hindu society has lost its spiritual dynamism and is being hijacked by various vested interests. As a rule, only those who do not respect the sanctity of a religion will seek to exploit it for political or economic advantages. Sub-human consumerism and soulless materialism have arrived in our midst on the wings of an alien culture of mindless indulgence, and now threaten to mortally infect the culture and character of our society. All that we have cherished, the best and noblest in our heritage, are now under risk of being squandered and dissipated. A moral, cultural and social crisis of unprecedented enormity now confronts us.

I am an Arya Samajist. In religious matters, I seek guidance and inspiration from the Arya Samaj's founder, the great Swami Dayanand Saraswati (1824-1883), my master. It is in the fitness of things, therefore, to ask how Swami Dayanand would have responded to the present scenario and what spiritual opportunities and challenges he would have faced today.

From a spiritual perspective, a time of anarchy is also a time for a spiritual breakthrough. Crisis results from the long-term denial and denigration of the sacred foundations of life. It calls for a willingness to read the writings on the wall, and revitalize our religion and society so as to regain the lost

ground. It is a basic principle in our religious outlook that God intervenes in times of anarchy to set matters right. But traditionally we have expected God to do everything and excused ourselves from the duty of work towards reform. Swami Dayanand Saraswati was a glorious exception to this. His religiosity expressed through various initiatives to rid religion and society of their various aberrations.

The Arya Samaj was an answer to the ills that his religion suffered from. The Samaj gave an elaborate liberative theology for Hinduism and Hindus. The new thing worked well. But today even that is not working. It has lost its shine and substance. Thus in order to maximize our effectiveness in today's context, we concentrate our efforts on two things : one is renewing the Arya Samaj movement itself and the second is to restart its liberative programme with great force and fervour.

BASICS OF TRUE RENEWAL

The key to renewal is a deeper understanding of the nature and scope of true spirituality. Admittedly, this has been our traditional weak spot. The Vedic vision signified a spiritual breakthrough which, over a period of time, has been superseded by a set of obscurantist rituals and dogmas. In this process, spirituality was turned into its opposite : as escape from the world of realities, rather than a dynamic and transforming engagement with it.

The second major aspect of renewal is the re-appropriation and re-interpretation of the original vision. This is necessary because every religion and ideology tends to move away from the original vision over a period of time. Moreover, societies and cultures change making it necessary for an inherited vision to be re-interpreted with contextual specificity. Only when Arya Samajists become spiritually pro-

active vis-à-vis their own age and context will they become true Aryas who honour and fulfil Swamiji's vision. We also need to become missionaries who, deriving inspiration from the past, seek to transform the given context with an eye to the future, in profound reverence to the human and the divine.

BACK TO THE VEDAS

Renewing the vision that Swami Dayanand has given to the Arya Samaj Movement involves returning to the Vedas, which are the sole foundation for our Aryan culture and spirituality. Indisputably, the Vedas give us a noble vision of what our society and our personal destiny should be. They are the repository of the values and ideals that help build a sane and dynamic society within which our spiritual destiny can be fulfilled.

Over the centuries we have drifted away from our fidelity to this spiritual heritage. The original Vedic vision has been corrupted by fabricating the deplorable caste system that allocates birth-based advantages and disabilities to individuals. Such an arrangement cannot be spiritually legitimate. It does not agree with rudimentary justice or even common sense. It was for this reason that the enlightened Swamiji issued a war cry against it. And we are obliged to continue his struggle against the caste system so as to create a just and dynamic society.

The third aspect of renewal is an uncompromising approach to all that distort and subvert human well-being in the material and religious spheres of their life. Those who compromise with the spirit of age will have nothing to give to renew their religion, culture and society. At all times, reform has been a risky vocation. The spirit of compromise overtakes those who cannot give the price of such a commitment, and

are tempted by the material and immediate advantages of conformity. Today for all practical purposes, the Arya Samaj Movement has lost its distinctiveness. The Arya Samajists allow themselves to be used by the forces of caste domination and oppression. We put up with social injustice, and are unmindful of the suffocation of our fellow human beings in the name of religion and politics. It is because the passion for justice and truth has died down in our midst that the Arya Samaj movement has got stuck.

EFFECTIVE ACTION PROGRAMME

The fourth aspect of renewal is that we discover an effective and relevant action programme through which we embody our spiritual vision and realize our goals. The alternative is to regress to the past and idolize its heroes. But we insult rather than respect their dynamic role models by paying lip service to them, instead of emulating their example. They became our heroes by engaging the world around them with a spiritual vision and fighting the evils and injustice of their times. They did not waste their time escaping to some escapist haven or obscurantist agenda. Swami Dayanand was excited about fulfilling the glorious destiny of India. He was obsessed with the greatness of human nobility and so felt obliged to fight all that distorted the glory and greatness of our species. It was from this perspective that he criticized all religions as well as launched a crusade against the caste system. Swamiji's mission continues to beckon us today. To the extent that we give ourselves to fulfilling this great dream, the Arya Samaj Movement will be renewed, and Bharat would once again become a land of Aryas (noble men).

Renewal calls for a spirit of courage and commitment! Such a vocation is not meant for the faint-hearted. The spirit of compromise is incompatible with the fire of reform. No

faith community can be renewed by airing a few nice sentiments. We must be willing to address the hard task of casting from our midst the forces and practices that contradict our spiritual vision and values. In this process, it is necessary to be realistic and reckon that change, no matter how valuable and positive, strikes most people as painful and undesirable. They feel threatened in their vested interests. Nothing new and noble can emerge unless there is the willingness to suffer and struggle. Renewal involves the willingness on the part of the people to give up whatever unjust and unspiritual advantages they have come to enjoy. The test of our sincerity of purpose is that we are willing to forego our social advantages in order to usher in a new era of spiritual vitality. As a rule, nothing can be for nothing. Anything worthwhile must be paid for. In course of time, we shall recognize that the unfair advantages based on caste superiority were indeed the substance of our collective bankruptcy.

Religious renewal calls for the identification of the bare essentials of true religion. This is an area of widespread and lamentable ignorance, especially in our community. One of the sound practices in the Christian community is the regular expounding of the scriptures, as part of their Sunday services. This ensures that the faithful are kept routinely reminded of scriptural role models, values and ideals. Renewal takes place when people return to the source of their spiritual inspiration, which empowers them to shift from their mean selves (*alpatman*) to their nobler selves (*mahatman*). This parallels the goal of the Arya Samaj, which aims at transforming all Indians into Aryas, or noble people (*mahatman*). So it is necessary that we ask as to what constitutes the essence of true religiosity.

God is the beginning and end of our spiritual quest, the very foundation of creation and all human life. Our understanding of God determines, therefore, the very flavour of our being, our character and culture. It is important, therefore,

that we have a spiritually valid and scripturally informed understanding of the nature of God, being aware that all human attempts, since the revelation in the Vedas, to describe God are tainted with vested interests in one form or another.

CONCERN FOR OTHERS : LIBERATIVE PROGRAMME

The key in this context is respect for life, which found its expression in the teachings of Swami Dayanand. Commitment to life is a necessary aspect of practising true religion. Concern for others, born out of the spiritual value of respect for life, enjoins on us to struggle against every form of exploitation and enslavement. It should make us intolerant of all avoidable disabilities and suffering. Instead, the spiritually unenlightened hold on to their advantages, no matter how irrational and unjust they are. The willingness to compromise the claims of the self (especially when they are irrational) to make room for the growth and fulfilment of others is the authentic mark of spiritual renewal. This is also the secret of personal greatness. Such nobility of character is possible only for human beings, and it is necessary that this precious part of our human heritage is not wasted.

Our ethical sense is born at the meeting point between the human and the divine. The kind of ethical ideals we have, and how faithfully we practise them are both a pointer to our understanding of, and respect for, God. The essence of ethics is the willingness to limit the desires and covetousness of the self to make room for others. This can be done only if we are ruled by a sense of accountability to God, from whom alone we can derive the strength to overcome the pulls of the self.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

Commitment to justice is the practical expression of ethics. Justice involves honouring the requirements of all relation-

ships. In our culture, we have a reasonable well-developed family consciousness. Doing justice to one's family commitment comes naturally to us (thought the coming of western cultural values is now undermining this part of our traditional strength). But we have been traditionally weak on the social front. Our commitment to social justice remains underdeveloped. And it is in this area that our spirituality is being put to sternest test. An escapist religiosity encourages us to close our eyes on the massive and avoidable suffering of the people all around us. Religious leaders live with their eyes closed on the millions of human beings who live in slavery in this supposedly free country. They are unconcerned about the many frontiers of systemic atrocities and injustices that have gone for ages. This is the most glaring denial of spirituality in the Indian context, and it needs to be challenged by the Arya Samaj that is committed to turning our society into an abode of noble people (*Aryas*), rather than of slaves and underdeveloped people.

Basic to the religious ethics is the spirit of service. Human nature, uninfluenced by spirituality, would make us want to be served rather than serve others. Service involves overcoming the spirit of selfishness. The spirit of service is essential to create a dynamic social ethos. The role models that scriptures give to us all uphold this ideal. It is necessary that we re-appropriate this value and incorporate into our social culture.

Seen from a cosmic perspective, the most important aspect of creation of its oneness, its coherence that lends meaning to its diversity. The need for harmony, the duty to live peaceably with all aspects of creation, and to respect its underlying integrity, arises out of this vision. But when the spiritual perspective declines, society and nature become aggregates of various constituents that can be exploited at will. It does not matter then if we exploit human beings or nature as

mere means to attain our ends. Admittedly, this is the attitude that governs us today, and is a major pointer to the need for spiritual renewal.

THE WORLD AROUND US

The world around us has changed a great deal. And spirituality, as against ritualistic religiosity, cannot remain indifferent to it. The goal of spirituality is to empower people to cope with their life and destiny meaningfully and effectively. This make it necessary to address the forces of corruption injustice that prevail from time to time. The ethical task is to minimize evil and to reinforce what is good. Both have to be addressed simultaneously. It is important that a religious community as a whole is inspired with this sense of purpose. It is foolish to assume that either politicians or the governments of the day can be, on their own, expected to do this for us.

The urgency in working towards a spiritual renewal of our society arises because of the rise of an aggressive and soulless materialistic culture in our midst. Two major facets mark this new ethos. In the first place, it aggravates social and economic inequalities. This is going to push millions more below the poverty line. There is likely to be in the near future a dramatic decline in quality of life for millions of people. This is not only a question of economics or even of 'good governance'. It is, essentially, a spiritual issue that none who cares for his religious values can ignore. The second aspect of the emerging scenario is increasing exploitation and rising levels of injustice. This will work at two levels :

(1) The traditional forces of caste oppression, to the extent that they have so far enjoyed a virtual monopoly over educational and systemic resources, could become more

and more oppressive, when their vested interests are threatened. This is already evident at present. Liberalization and the shift of focus from the public sector to the private, cannot but have the effect of strengthening the hands of the already powerful and privileged. The Dalits and economically disadvantaged will be excluded from the new opportunities. People's participation in public affairs is already diluted. Economic forces are becoming autonomous, neutralizing the advantages and opportunities of democracy. It is important that in such a context extreme spiritual vigilance is exercised over the process of social engineering to ensure that the society we build is hospitable to the aspirations of all people, which is the hallmark of a just society. The larger task of true religion is to build a healthy society and dynamic culture.

(2) The emergence of the global order complicated this picture even further. Now the poorer peoples of the world are going to be the victims of a double exploitation. They will be bled not only by their own elite but also become the victims of the general bleeding of their countries at the hands of the global players. It seems to be part of the logic of history that a society that flouts the basic norms of justice within itself will eventually succumb to the forces of injustice from beyond its own borders. If we are to face the emerging challenges, it is necessary that we build a model society where justice and equity are honoured, and top priority is given to empowering all people. It is not unlikely that globalization does to our country as a whole what we have been doing for centuries to our own Dalits and tribals. The creation of a society free from the leprosy of injustice, exploitation and aggression should be deemed as an urgent patriotic task for the Arya Samaj.

THE SCANDAL OF THE CASTE SYSTEM

In this context, it becomes imperative to launch an all-out war against the caste system. It is high time for the truth to be spoken, even if it hurts. The Vedic faith is indeed in danger. But the painful truth is that the real danger is not from an external enemy, like Christianity or Islam. As a rule, the enemy within is far more dangerous than all external enemies put together. The Vedic faith has been in danger ever since the birth-based caste order has been invented by the ingenuity of the Brahminical order to perpetuate their arbitrary advantages, consigning the lower castes to a sub-human existence. The Vedic faith as it was converted into Hinduism was, ironically, corrupted from a noble, dynamic and just social vision into an oppressive mechanism. This was done at an enormous cost to the Sanatan Dharma, turning it virtually into its opposite. Brahmanical Hinduism is a contradiction and caricature, as Swami Dayanand Saraswati made bold to say, of its Vedic ancestor.

When the early challenges to the caste order began to emerge, the keepers of the system issued the call to 'semiticize' or Islamize Hinduism! This itself should have proved, if proof indeed was necessary, that the agenda was a barely camouflaged project to protect the caste system. Rather than return to the Vedic vision, it was found more palatable to turn Hinduism into a replica of Islam or Christianity! The strange logic was that Hinduism could be protected by making it a counterfeit copy of its enemies!

The fact that the oppressed people in their thousands, Ambedkar and his followers being an example, have been forced to leave this oppressive system should have awakened us to the need for reform. It did not. Instead, attempts have been made all along to tighten the chains of caste oppression and to arrest the process of social regeneration. Even when

we do not approve all that the Christian missionaries have done in the past, we still overlook the fact that high caste protectionism was not at work in portraying them as the enemies of Hinduism. Today, as an Arya Samajist, I deem it immoral, and a betrayal of the mission of the Movement, to bolster caste Hinduism that opposes the awakening of the oppressed. The spiritual destiny of India will be fulfilled only when the passion for justice and equality that underlies the Vedic faith is translated into a social reality in the path of which the caste order is the major stumbling block.

Condemning or rewarding anybody simply on the basis of birth is simply incompatible with true religion. That being the case, the need of the hour is not to re-convert a few Dalit Christians or Muslims, but to reconvert Hinduism back to the Vedic faith. The Arya Samaj is duty bound to lead the entire Hindu society towards this noble goal as long as it remains faithful to the spirit and mission of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. This is the most important frontier for the mission of the Arya Samaj at the present time.

As against the absolutization of birth within the caste order, the *Varna Vyavastha* that the Vedas envisage bases itself on action, talent and aptitude (*Karma, Guna, Swabhava*). This is clearly expounded by Lord Krishna in the *Gita*. Vedic faith envisages a dynamic social order in which every individual is free to exercise himself fully and attain maximum growth and fulfilment. It is a society characterized by equality of opportunity which is incompatible with birth-based privileges.

The most important choice that every human being must have is the right to choose his temporal and eternal destiny. Once gunas rather than birth become the basis for evaluation, an individual becomes free to be a Brahman or a Shudra. Turning Brahmanism into a label of birth has emptied it of all significance. The caste system has robbed the Indian society of its dynamism and has been mainly responsible for our suc-

cessive subjugation by external forces. Like the license Raj that protected the monopoly of a few at the expense of many, the caste order, further crippled by fatalism, has kept our life and society paralyzed for centuries. Conversions are inevitable after having liberalized everything else! Religions would compete among themselves in wooing the poor and the neglected sections of other faiths. Make your faith liveable, just and good. Let everybody be given equal terms to prove and improve their worth by deepening their social consciousness and commitment to justice. Nobody will leave your faith then.

All faithful Arya Samajists can only feel betrayed by the treacherous collusion between the protagonist of the caste order and certain sections in the Arya Samaj, as in the reconversion hoax reported from time to time. The Arya Samaj priests are being used to reconvert ex-Hindus only because Brahmanical Hinduism has no place for converts. Patronizing such a project amounts to a betrayal of the true legacy of Swami Dayanand Saraswati. Swamiji's zeal for bringing back relapsed Hindus was matched by his revulsion for the caste order, which he sought to dismantle. This cost him his life. No Arya Samajist in particular and Hindus in general therefore can lend to anything that makes a mockery of Swamiji's call 'Back to the Vedas!' and his passion for reform. The more violence is practised to defend the caste system, the more Hinduism will get discredited in the eyes of the people, especially of the coming generation. In the days ahead we can no longer count on old loyalties and blind faith. An age of free choice, symbolized by the super market where people push trolleys of personal tastes, has already come upon us. We better improve the quality of our brand rather than cry wolf against other brands. If the Tatas had to do it in the field of automobiles, it may be unavoidable for us to address this urgent task in the religious sphere. At any rate, the rationale for conver-

sion cannot be honestly abolished unless birth-based caste system is abolished. Concentrating on the aberrations of conversions and refusing at the same time to recognizing the extent to which caste oppression aids and abets conversions, is both unrealistic and dishonest.

THE CHALLENGE OF GLOBALIZATION

At any rate, the foremost need today is not to fight dishonest battles to protect caste system. The real need of the hour is to strengthen the nation and revitalize the society to face the challenges of the emerging global order. All internal contradictions, every institution of discrimination and injustice, will only weaken us in our ability to address the challenges of external forces. This is why we need to recognize that the days of caste discrimination are over. Today we have to choose between our faithfulness to caste and our commitment to our real religion, the great Hinduism and to the very integrity of our country, and its future within the comity of nations.

The emerging global scenario is also going to awaken new spiritual needs and thirst. So far the illogicality of Hinduism as a territorial faith was not all that apparent. But in the days ahead, this idea of religion will be patently anachronistic. We will have to return to the true vision of the Vedas which is not territorial but earth-centred. Its vision, in other words, embraces the word as a whole. Obviously, this alone will be able to cope with the dynamics of the global order. Every living religion has had to continue to evolve in relation to the challenges that emerged from time to time. Judaism was, like Hinduism today, very much a territorial faith. Christianity was a protest against this. It had a future only because of the universality of the vision underlying it. It is noteworthy that all our thinkers who were persuaded of the universal validity of the Vedic vision also emphasized its universal char-

acter, rather than its territorial confinement. The irony of our times is that even that which claims to be universal in the name of Hinduism (as in the case of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad) pushes only a territorial version of Hinduism. This is a glaring contradiction in terms. This may excite the unenlightened for a while, but such a vision has no scope or future in the global arena.

We also need to rethink the model of conflict for inter-religious relationships that has been imported into this country. It does not have to be argued that religious tolerance is basic to the Indian ethos and it is well-founded on the Vedic insight that all religions are different paths to the ultimate Reality.

Faithfulness to this enlightened insight rules our religious intolerance. Historically, religious intolerance has been imported into this country by Islamic and Christian models. But both of them have been deeply influenced and tamed by the spirit of tolerance, which is the genius of the subcontinent. But in this process, we seem to have imbibed something of the poison that they carried. Today some of the defenders of Hinduism seem to be animated by the Semitic spirit of intolerance rather than by the all-embracing vision of the Vedas. It is more inappropriate for true Hinduism to practise religious intolerance than it is for either Islam and Christianity, as long as we subscribe to the Vedic insight that all faiths lead to the same final goal.

Moreover, religious diversity is a means for religious revival. It is only when a religious tradition is challenged by a different one that the need for its revival becomes evident. The beginning of the Arya Samaj Movement is an instance of this. The challenge of Christianity in the last century was one of the stimulants for this movement. But to respond constructively to external stimuli, the given religious tradition has to be in some state of health. Total negativity to what is different and alien is a sign of spiritual decadence and the reluctance to

be renewed about which we need to be seriously alarmed. The Inter-faith Movement all over the world has the main goal of deepening the spirituality of particular religions. Evolution takes place within the model of 'challenge-and-response'. To ward off all challenges is to avoid the need to improve and grow.

SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS OF NATION-BUILDING

Afro-Asian nations continue to be cradles of human suffering. Avoidable plagues of violence, poverty, disease and deprivation continue to harass millions. Since the Second World War, the war fought to end all wars, more than 150 armed conflicts have taken place. The majority of them have been in this region. More than 10 million children have been either killed, or orphaned or uprooted in the last decade alone. African nations that are blessed with natural resources continue to be paralyzed in their progress. The well-being of millions has been subverted for whatever reasons. This is wholly a man-made and avoidable tragedy, and it needs to be recognized and engaged as such.

The curse is that 'nation' is equated with a flag, a territory or an ideology. The fact that people are its supreme wealth is being increasingly ignored. It is the people who shape a nation's character and culture. Good governance rests on an uncompromising commitment to the welfare of the people. None will debate this in theory. But this is consistently flouted in practice. In the cynical calculations and strategic manoeuvres that flourish, human beings have become mere pawns in the ongoing game on the political chessboard. Governance and development are seen as impersonal and value-neutral processes dictated by cupidity and the lust for power. The withering irony of people's insignificance in democracy (definitionally, the government of the people, by the

people, and for the people) stares us in the face.

Given the diabolic turn that life and history are taking, and the massive suffering that this has created, it is obvious that a spiritual foundation is essential for nation-building. It is naïve to assume that all that is needed to build a strong and prosperous nations are a gigantic effort and massive planning. We need to pay attention to the foundation, lest what we build collapse over our heads, as it now threatens to. It is in this respect that materialism has amounted to practical blindness. Since this approach to life attaches importance and reality only to the tangible and material dimensions of life, it tends to devalue the invisible and subtle resources of life, such as values and a sense of accountability to God. This suicidal mistake needs to be corrected, if we are to achieve any break-through in the present scenario.

The hallmark of a spiritually valid political vision is the priority of people, especially the poor and the powerless, over everything else. As Gandhiji insisted, every economic policy, every political strategy, every system in the country, must justify itself with reference to the well-being of the common man, and not merely the elite and the powerful. From a spiritual perspective, the meeting point between healthy politics and true religion is the commitment to total human well-being. Everything in a spiritual vision-the emphasis on peace, the focus on unity and healthy relationships, accountability in resource management, justice and equity in distributing resources, and so on – is based on this. Politics needs to be redeemed by true spirituality. Instead, we politicize religion and communalize politics, undermining the health of the nation and endangering the well-being of the people.

SPIRITUALITY AND THE HEALING OF A NATION

Integral to the spiritual vision is the insight that nations, not

less than individuals, become sick and stand in need of healing and renewal. A spiritually vibrant religion is marked by its commitment to safeguard the wholeness of life in the nation as a whole. A religion that remains blind to this task condemns itself. A spiritually committed person will be ready to engage every issue and every force that has a bearing on human well-being.

The sickness of our existence expresses itself broadly as the contradiction between what we intend to achieve and what we end up doing. This turns our dreams into nightmares. The State, for example, is envisaged to be the foremost instrument of human well-being. It is mandated to secure human development and fulfilment. It is an instrument of care, and a standard-bearer of values. The weak and the vulnerable are to be especially protected and promoted. These are the goals. But they are rarely the net results. 'We create the State', said Sigmund Freud, 'to oppress us'. How come that the State, which is meant to be a caring institution, acquires an oppressive character?

BEWARE OF FALSE EXPECTATIONS

It is not the business of religion to give us a comprehensive plan of political action, contextually specific and eternally valid. It is in vain that we turn to the Vedas or any other scriptural text, to find a well-defined political agenda. The spiritual task is not to supersede the political domain, but to be a catalyst and guardian of human well-being within the economic and political processes. What is needed is the integration of the spiritual vision and discipline into the total processes that shape the affairs of a nation. This is different from a magical approach to religion in which religion is seen as a short cut to solving human problems but as isolated from the dynamic of day-to-day life, from the larger questions of poli-

tics and economics. It is different, on the other hand, from a secular approach to these spheres that sees both as autonomous activities to which spirituality is extraneous and irrelevant. The distinctive mark of a spiritual vision is its integration of the various facets of human life : the economic, political, social and cultural. Spirituality is, essentially, a force of integration. It is indeed the only enduring force of integration, without which all that we build up collapse into confusion.

People turn to religion to find magical solutions for their problems, without having to reform themselves. They think that god's business is to solve the problems they create. This is an insult to the majesty of God. God's business is more radical than we care to admit: it is to solve the problem that we are. God is not partial to this economic system or that political ideology. She may not be more excited about the Market Economy than She is about the crude barter system. Her primary concern is with the people who operate both. More specifically, She is concerned about the contradiction between human nature and human well-being. The truth that stares us in the face is that human nature, in its unredeemed state, is subversive of human welfare. The fundamental spiritual quest is, therefore, not for a newer system or ideology, though both may be necessary. It is, instead, to set man free from the dungeon that he is: to liberate every human being from the distortions of human nature that he may be free and able to do what is conducive to his own well-being and the welfare of others. It does not matter whether we are under monarchy or democracy, as long as we do not have the capacity to love our neighbours as ourselves, and to do to others what we would that they should do to us.

A PARADIGM-SHIFT

The fundamental spiritual task is to bring about a radical

change in human nature: from its unjust, exploitative orientation to the spiritual, self-transcending orientation. The Vedas urge us to imbibe such a transformed, noble spiritual ethos. Until that happens, individuals and groups will pursue their vested interests with murderous intensity and practice maximum possible violence (unless checked by fear of consequences) on those who are seen as threats. This turns life and society into battlegrounds. Human self-centredness will not want to grant even survival space to others. Everything is seen as the means to promote one's own interest. It is this orientation that is at work in the caste system.

In contrast, the essence of spirituality is the sacrificial orientation. It is only from such an outlook that human well-being can be prioritized in practice, not less than in theory. The essence of human self-centredness is the absolutization of power. Worldly power becomes the idol, which is loved passionately and absolutely. This inhibits and corrupts our love for God, our respect for the divine. It is in the nature of power, especially when divorced from the spirituality of responsibility and accountability, to exploit and oppress. Creating and perpetuating conflicts and destruction are integral to its strategies. Power is essentially hegemonic. It has no patience with ideals like justice, equality and truth. The more ungodly a generation is, the more these ideals tend to be violated.

TOWARDS HEALING A NATION

Religion is worthless if it is indifferent to the suffering of the people it is meant to serve. Spirituality is a dynamic and transforming engagement with the worlds around us, and it has no room for apathy or escapism. It can empower peoples and nations alike. Spirituality must have something to offer vis-à-vis the problems that afflict a people. Here we need to

examine only a few illustrative areas.

(1) Disunity. Political schism and disunity plague most societies in the world in Africa and Asia. It is naïve to assume that the problem is only in the armed conflicts that take place. The problem is in our minds and hearts. We allow our minds to be filled with hate. We see others as threats and stumbling blocks. We want to pursue our interests at the expense of the well-being of others. All these are double-edged swords. When it begins to cut our own throat we also talk about need for unity and harmony. It should be kindergarten wisdom that disunity will persist as long as our minds are not detoxified. The spiritual goal is to cultivate a spiritual mental culture. From a spiritual perspective, unity is of utmost importance. But unity has to be seen as part of the commitment to truth, sanctity of life and a sense of mission aimed at maximizing human well-being. Disunity is inevitable as long as vested interests reign. And the task of true spirituality is to transcend selfish goals.

(2) Violence and Disharmony. It is too obvious to escape anyone's notice that even as spiritual discipline declines, violence and destruction mount in a society. This endangers life and liberty. Violence results from two major sources; hate and the inability to cope creatively with differences, both of which are inevitable in the power-orientation. The spiritual strategy to heal this situation is to replace the love of power with the power of love. Love unites; whereas hate divides and scatters. It is of utmost importance to see spirituality as the power to relate to what is the essence of genuine freedom. Those who are spiritually enlightened transcend stereotypical distinctions and categories that divide people. They work in terms of the essential and endangered humanity of all

people. A nation is not safe unless its people are equipped to live with differences. Differences are real and important, and it is dishonest to suggest that they do not exist. But the recognition of differences is not an invitation to be alienated from each other. It is the unspiritual mind that feels insecure in the presence of what is different. But, in coping creatively with differences, we must not abandon the commitment to truth. But truth needs to be enlivened with love.

(3) Development and Justice. Ungodly developmentalism is the root cause of our economic disarray and endemic destitution. On the one hand, it idolizes wealth at the expense of human welfare. On the other, it aggravates inequalities of every kind. It is axiomatic that a society of aggravating disparities between the rich and the poor that is to say, a society that dilutes justice in the context of development) digs its own grave. It does so by patronizing human covetousness which kills compassion and turns the public space into a jungle of consumerism and self-indulgence. Our people suffer not necessarily because we do not have enough resources to meet their needs. Most of the Afro-Asian nations are potentially rich countries inhabited by starving people. What we lack is an unwavering commitment to people's well-being, and a collective pledge to tame the dogs of corruption and covetousness. As Gandhiji used to say, the earth has enough to meet everyone's needs, but not enough to satisfy anyone's greed.

Justice needs to be seen as a divine concern. Practising justice has to be a spiritual, not legal, commitment. Injustice is inseparable from corruption and untruth. Falsehood is the most universal form of violence. A peaceful and sane society can be built only on the foundation of truth and sanctity. Wherever justice is denied,

violence results. This problem will not be solved by increasing the police or para-military forces. Not even by using the army against one's own people. This malady can be healed only with the anti-dotes of love, truth and justice.

Violence needs to be seen not only as a series of events, but as being generated within an outlook that makes its outbreak unavoidable. It is like the heat generated by two parts of a machine that are in friction. That friction is written into the logic of selfish human nature. The solution for this problem, hence, can only be a radical one; the transformation of human nature and, consequently, the spiritual regeneration of our society.

It is at this level that the spiritual agenda for building a healthy nation has to be worked out. But the problem is that those who pride themselves on their pragmatism tend to be impatient with the long-term agenda involved in this approach. People are everywhere looking for short cuts and quick-fix solutions, in this age of fast-food and instant nirvana. The truth is that all short-cuts are necessarily deceptive, and turn out in the end to be avenues of deception and corruption.

THE CORNER STONES OF A SANE SOCIETY

Essential to the health and dynamism of every society are:

(1) Resource Management. Spirituality touches our attitude to the material world and the way we manage resources. We are in a state of trusteeship as far as the resources of this world are concerned. Everything is God-given. Our spirituality in the political and economic spheres of our national life involves the responsibility for ensuring the

well-being of all people in managing the resources of the nation. Increasing productivity needs to be matched by the willingness to share the fruits thereof with all in need. The sinfulness of contemporary approaches and systems manifests itself in the exclusion of the people in need from the fruits of development. Till recently this used to happen mainly at the national level. Now, in the wake of globalism, this could become an international reality, unless we are spiritually vigilant.

(2) Stewardship also involves being responsible for the total well-being of the people. It is tragic that in the midst of our political and economic projects and enterprises, we lose sight of the weaker sections of our society. People are getting increasingly alienated from each other. Those who were once neighbours are becoming enemies. The State cannot any longer continue to see its role, in this context, as that of a policeman who keeps people from fighting. The State has to become an active agent for the propagation of life-friendly values. Enabling people to love one another, rather than preventing them from fighting and killing each other, needs to be the emphasis.

(3) Human worth. Essential to the spiritual outlook on life is the affirmation of the supreme worth of human life. If this is recognised, we shall fight against injustice, poverty and oppression, rather than our fellow human beings. The agenda common to healthy religion and constructive politics is the commitment to affirm human worth and to maximize the well-being of all people. All spiritually enlightened initiatives are singularly devoted to this goal. In contrast, it is heart-breakingly ironic that for most people in the world a flag, territory, and an ideology are more important than the life and well-being of millions of people. Over 120 million human beings

would not have died of man-made violence in this century otherwise. Look at the millions that continue to die either through conflicts or through avoidable famine and starvation. No nation can be healthy and dynamic unless it is committed to honouring human worth and protecting human life. It is necessary to recognize the synergy between development and human worth. The impetus to develop will continue to be absent, if a nation does not develop, it will never discover the full scope of the ideal of human worth. The value attached to a human life varies from one society to another, depending on the extent of their development.

(4) Development with equity and compassion. Ironically material development of a certain kind, not less than underdevelopment, could be a source of national disarray. While underdevelopment devalues human life, development understood only as increase in the material circumstances of life soon degenerates into covetousness, consumerism and criminality. The materialistic society, for one thing, will always and everywhere have a criminal fringe. Besides this, it unleashes a spirit of competition, which makes people mistake their neighbours for their enemies. Many of the communal and ethnic conflicts are, essentially, economic conflicts to secure a disproportionate part of the national cake and to disable, if possible, others from sharing national resources. Even where this does not happen in a naked fashion, development that neglects the spiritual and moral aspects of the human situation brings about the impoverishment of human life.

True development must harmonize the material and spiritual nourishment of the human being. It is this whole-some balance that we need to insist on, especially in the wake of globalization. This needs to be seen in the

light of the uniqueness of our being as a body-soul continuum. The body cannot be flattened by famishing the soul, and vice versa. As a matter of fact: one of the major reasons for the growing violence in advanced societies is the exuberance of physical energy (due to enhanced food intake) unmatched and unbridled by moral and spiritual stamina. Violence is often a phenomenon of imbalance. It may seem positive, but is essentially negative.

(5) Work Culture vs. Corruption. No society can continue to remain healthy and dynamic if it does not evolve and sustain a wholesome work culture. While this is universally recognized, the role of spirituality in this sphere often goes unacknowledged. A healthy work culture is based on two major factors ; (i) the commitment to uphold *dharma* in the pursuit of one's vocation, and (ii) compassion for one's neighbours that makes one want to care and to share. In cultures where this sense of social responsibility is underdeveloped, work culture also remains embryonic. More seriously, the erosion of work culture fuels corruption in every society. Work involves spiritual discipline, through which one grows and matures. The alternative is to resort to short-cuts through which the discipline of work is diluted. Corruption is the alternative to work in a spiritually and morally depraved society. Corruption is, more accurately, an anti-work culture in which wealth is idolized. A corrupt society cannot but disintegrate into violence sooner or later.

(6) The Attitude to the Other. A nation is basically a vast human family. Relationships between people are of decisive importance for its character and destiny. What shapes this is people's attitude to each other. It is here that spirituality can and must play a constructive role. From a worldly and materialistic standpoint that pro-

motes self-centredness, others are seen as threats to one's own interests. The spiritual vision celebrates our sense of community and human inter-dependence. It opens our eyes to the suicidal folly of wanting to thrive at the expense of others. A nation is like a ship afloat on a perilous sea. We shall survive or perish together. Security or well-being can never be selective. Either we are all safe, or we are all at risk. This is the practical wisdom in the practice of love and compassion. To love is to progress together; for love is constructive and active in the service of what is good. The opposite of this is the spirit of hegemony that seeks to oppress others and reserve all advantages to oneself. It is natural that such an outlook perpetuates and escalates conflicts, and cripples the nation.

Powerful vested interests are at work in the global arena to foment internal and regional hostilities. One such network is the global arms Mafia. It is a pity that Afro-Asian nations that cannot afford to feed their people and educate their children are spending a lion's share of their scarce resources on buying and stockpiling arms. This is aided and abetted by the vested interests within a country. But if the people of this region are to have any quality life a radical breakthrough in this area must be achieved.

(7) A Culture of Ahimsa (Peace). This calls for the creation of a culture of peace. The strategic, as against the spiritual, approach to peace-making is riddled with contradictions. It is, indeed, an aspect of war-mongering. That is why the nations of the world clamour for peace and prepare for war at the same time! The outlook that governs the world is based on the paradigm of power. Creating peace on an enduring foundation involves a paradigm shift from power to love. People must be chal-

> lenged and trained to love one another, rather than hate each other. Hate costs a nation dear. Love is more profitable than hate!

But hate will seem a more practical and effective strategy to those who are worldly. That is because hate takes less energy than love, though hate results in colossal instances of destruction. It has no energy for anything positive. Hate is a corollary to power. Power has a native genius for the superficial. Power can operate only on the surface of things. Power is powerless in the depth, where spirituality belongs. The only power that works at this level is the power of love. Those who base their life's vision on power, exile themselves from the depth of things. They become perforce superficial. What can be controlled and manipulated is the surface. At the depth, one can only function in faith and wonder. Awareness of the divine and bhakti are depth-experiences. Materialism and consumerism are allergic to this culture of depth. They are the play on the surface. Surface is also a domain of restlessness and conflict where peace is a mirage.

This may seem too mystical a strategy for establishing peace in our world of grubby materialism. Exactly! It is foolish to imagine that we can secure the cause of peace by remaining on the foundation of conflict and restlessness. That is where we are today. Spirituality comes with an invitation to shift from this foundation. This does not involve any indifference to things worldly. Rather this enhances the duty to develop everything entrusted to us. But what this outlook changes is the significance we attach to the fruits of our labour and, more importantly, our sense of exclusive ownership as far as the fruits of our labour are concerned. The lust for grasping and grabbing will be replaced by the joy of sharing. The craving for indulgence will give way to the concern for the well-being of all people. Cooperation and kinship will su-

persede conflict. Without his spiritual revolution, the supreme enterprise of nation building can only rest on fragile foundations. The destiny of a nation rests, in the final analysis, on the character of its people. And human character can be noble and creative only when shaped and nourished by true spirituality.

PART TWO

BUDDHISM

4

THE BUDDHIST WAY TO LIBERATION OF SOCIETY

Kuliyapitiye Prananda

The great religions of the world originated and had their early growth within the Asian social background. Hinduism was born in India. The Zoroastrian religion had its birth in Persia, presently known as Iran. Judaism originated in Palestine. These are the oldest among the world religions. Confucianism, which was more a code of ethics than a religion, had its birth and became widely accepted in China and made the biggest impact in the Far East. The three great religions that evolved subsequently were Buddhism, Christianity and Islam.

The Jain religion of India, Taoism of China and Shintoism of Japan did not become worldwide, but remained confined to certain regional boundaries. But their contribution to the formation of Asian cultures was considerable, due not only to their long history, but also because of their richness in spiritual values.

At the same time, there also emerged schools of philosophy that reacted to these religions and there has been a continuing dialogue between them, which has had a profound impact on Asian social development. The ancient civilizations that grew up in China, Indian and in Central Asia gave rise to vast improvements in the field of production. These in turn influenced the religious and ideological trends in society and

enriched the cultural life of the people. The emergence of science, at the beginning of the modern age, started in the West and spread to Asia like a great storm and shook traditional Asian thoughts. This same storm continues to produce ever renewing waves of influence on Asian societies. Particular attention should therefore be paid to this influence and the dialogue that is created by them.

To deal with our subject fully and in depth, one has to examine all these different aspects. We do not propose to do this, not only owing to the constrains of time but also because such an undertaking is beyond the scope of one individual in one's life-time. I have been asked to look at this topic from a Buddhist point of view. I must first confess that I am no expert even to discuss this limited area completely.

To examine the influence of Buddhism on the formation of Asian Societies, it is necessary at least to study the teachings of the two basic Sects of Buddhism, their history and the impact they made on the social formation of the different countries of Asia. Various scholars have tried to study them and synthesise them separately. This Seminar is the first occasion that I know of which attempts to take a holistic approach to the study of this topic.

THE GREAT DIALOGUE ON DHAMMA

The basic sects that I referred to earlier are the Mahayana and the Hinayana. My own view is that this very terminology contradicts the true Buddhist tradition. It is said that Siduhath (Sidhartha) the hermit, defeated the forces of evil in attaining the state of "Buddha" or in reaching the understanding of "the Truth." There were ten evil forces and tenth was described as "*Attukkansana-Parawambhana*", that is to praise one's own self and to degrade the others. To separate the path of liberation, described in the fundamental teachings of Bud-

dhism into two camps (or two sects) and to say that one is greater (Mahayana) and the other is less (Hinayana) is to fall prey to this evil tendency that Buddha defeated at the foot of the Botree. Evil forces are the views and attitudes that obstruct the attainment of liberation. Therefore, we can imagine the extent of damage done to the essence of the liberational message of Buddhism by conceding this classification.

This division into sects, however, has contributed towards the spreading of Buddhism in different regions of Asia. It led to competition between the sects to out-do the other in popularizing one's own sect. There were many positive results too. This inter-sect competition resulted in the building of a great dialogue on *'Dhamma'* both among Buddhist philosophers and among ordinary people. This dialogue greatly enriched *'Dhamma'* literature and strong new philosophical trends were born. (The formulation of the theory of Relativity by the Great teacher Nagarjunapada is an example). These had a great impact on social life too. The Great dialogue on *'Dhamma'* contributed towards the formation of democratic traditions in the life of the people. Another outcome of this competition was that popular masses began to be attracted by the greatness of mind and the spirit of dedication of the philosophers and thinkers who spearheaded this dialogue.

In general, these dialogues were conducted in a peaceful, democratic and an intellectual atmosphere. However, seeing the great influence that these schools of thought had on the popular masses, there were numerous instances when the rulers (that is the state) took sides with one or the other sect. Sometimes this led to unpleasant consequences. That was when unnecessary clashes or conflicts arose among the sects leading to burning of books and libraries, demolition of temples, viharas and ashrams. There were also rare instances of physical violence on the clergy and laity. Thus this inter-sect rivalry took different forms in different countries and made

tremendous positive and negative contributions towards the formation of the different societies. For a proper analysis of the past and the present role of Buddhism in the formation of Asian societies in order to reach definite conclusions, it is necessary to study the history of Buddhism which separated into two main sects, the Mahayana and the Hinayana, relating it to a proper study of the socio-economic and political histories of the respective countries and their cultural environments.

The resources that I have at present and the time available would not permit me to attempt even a complete analysis of that nature. Therefore, I am naturally restricted to base my remarks primarily on the experiences of my birth-place Sri Lanka, its Buddhist traditions, its rites and usages, the doctrine and its social influence.

REFLECTION OF THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC SYSTEM

Hinayana Buddhism, one of the two basic sects mentioned earlier has taken deep root in Sri Lanka. It is more popularly named "Theravada Buddhism". It is generally accepted that teachings of Buddha are recorded in an undistorted form in the "*Tripitaka Dhamma*" (the books of doctrine) of Theravada Buddhists. The fundamental doctrine (*Dhamma*) is in three volumes "*Sutra*", "*Vinaya*" and "*Abidhamma*". A deep analysis of the nature of the human person (or human-kind) and its classification into different categories is included in Abidhamma, while the nature of society and its classification into categories is found in the *Sutra* and *Vinaya*.

Although these are separated for the purpose of study, they cannot be understood in isolation. The doctrine of Buddhism cannot be understood without taking these elements together as an integrated whole. Although I have mentioned them separately as 'human nature' and the 'nature of society',

on careful examination we see that the 'Buddha' analyses these two as the nature of human person and of society within a definite social system based on private ownership of property. Buddhist scholars and commentators of later periods have tried to study these as abstract works separating them from each other and as a result the integrated approach to analysis was gradually overlooked. The elements of doctrine on the nature of human person and its different categories have been subjected to very deep and sharp analysis, but it was done in a manner that isolates the human being from the nature of society in which he lives. Therefore the extremely broad and detailed analysis seen in *Abidharma Pitakaya* is not seen in the other two volumes. In *Abidharma Pitakaya*, the analysis of the nature of human person is done by presenting necessary data, which are then classified, analysed and conclusions are drawn using statistical data, reports in symbols and graphical and tabulated presentations. All these point not to a definite human being in a historical context but to a concept of unchanging human nature for all time.

However, examining the elements of doctrine in *Sutra* and *Vinaya Pitaka*, it becomes very clear that the above is not the case. I would use two examples from *Sutra Pitakaya* to illustrate this.[1] They are :

1. The first sermon preached by the Buddha "*Dhamma Chakkhappawatta Suthraya*".
2. *Chakawaththi Seehanada Suthraya* and *Aaganna Suthraya* in *Deegha Nikaya*.

It would have been possible to make a very sharp examination and an analysis of society using the above *Sutras*. If this is done, it would be possible to make a deep analysis of the evolution of society and to formulate a very clear system of political economy. Some of the basic facts given in the first

example are as follows :

Indian Society of the day was divided into the extremes of wealth and poverty. At one extreme there were those who possessed and enjoyed an abundance of the highest forms of worldly pleasures and there were others who suffered extreme forms of poverty and depravity. The ideological reflection of this reality was that there are two extremes in the concept of liberation and the paths to achieve it. One was to give maximum satisfaction and pleasure to the senses while the other was the complete suppression of the sensual desires. But the Buddha's finding was that neither of these would liberate human-kind since both extremes accept the situation as it is, and brings about no change and that liberation lies in the rejection of both these extremes. In order to change the existing situation, he presented the Middle Path (*Madjima Patipada*) or the '*Arya Ashtangika Marga*' – the Noble Eight-fold Pathas the synthesis that emerges from the conflict between the two extremes. He presented the Four Noble Truths (*Chahuraya Sathyaya*), that is the existing situation, the reason for the existence of this situation, the changing of the situation and the way to change it as the synthesis of all these. These are :

1. *Dukkha Satyaya*	-	the existing situation
2. *Samudaya Satyaya*	-	the reason for the situation
3. *Nirodha Satyaya*	-	changing the situation
4. *Marga Satyaya*	-	the way to change

From the two examples from the *Sutra* mentioned earlier, we can see the socio-economic base and the historical evolution of such factors and their objectives. Accordingly, the Buddha explained the fact of existence of a very ancient "*Sangha* Society" (i.e. a Society based on the common ownership form of property relationships) and the gradual emergence of prop-

erty relations based on private ownership within such a society. He further explained how women began to be considered a "private possession" of the men, which led to the use of sex, the separation of society into classes of "haves" and the "have-nots", taking up arms or weapons as a result of this division and the rise of regimentation (or the establishment of the organs of State machinery). The growth in complex relationships of production and the division of labour, which lead to the emergence of different professional groups was explained on that basis. In addition, the beginning of the formation of the energy as a separate group was clarified. Finally, the negation of this society based on inequality was explained together with an indication of the basic characteristics of the ideal society that would emerge in the future as a result of such negation. The Buddha described these characteristics of the ideal social system as follows :

It would be a society of prosperity and abundance, highly populated and with a plentiful supply of food. There would be eighty-four thousand cities in such society. The earth would be freed from punishments, liberated from armaments, and become a righteous world. The Buddha named this Kingdom the Kethumathi.

This description of future society says that it would consist of a large number of cities and would have a city culture. The people would be of very high productive ability and would therefore be free from want. They would also be free from weapons and punishment and would therefore be free from the burden of the State machinery.

We, who have experienced a number of social revolutions and the great achievements of the revival of modern science, are also able to see that this future society is not a mere Utopia, but a world that human-kind can achieve. This is why I said at the beginning that we have to pay special attention to

the great achievements of modern science in dealing with the subject of the role of religion in the formation of Asian societies.

But founding the "*Sangha Samajaya*" ('*Sangha*' is the term used for the clergy living a collective form of life), the Buddha intended to demonstrate to the people a practical model of the future society that he conceptualised.

THE SANGHA SOCIETY

I now intend to draw your attention to examine the beginning of this *Sangha* society, its evolution, its extension and the impact it makes on the rest of society.

The Buddha did not inaugurate the '*Sasana*' by setting up a *Sangha* society housed in a particular location. The conditions for this were created much later. It was only a programme for propagation of *Dhamma* (the doctrine). The first words of advice by the Buddha to the monks was 'Go now monks and wander for the good of the people, for the happiness of the people out of compassion for the world'. 'Let two persons not take on the same path.' Therefore at the beginning the *bhikku* did not have any settled life. The Buddha, apart from not approving any person staying on in one place, did not even approve two persons taking the same route. As more and more people of contemporary society accepted *Dhamma* as truth, as rational and intelligible, and accept it as the path for liberation, it began to obtain greater patronage and assistance. This had its influences on the "*Sangha Sasana*" in many different ways. The number entering the Sasana as clergy as well as the number of lay adherents increased. The acceptance of women into the *Sasana* as *Bhikkunis* was a great revolution in the attitudes that existed in the contemporary society. Great wealth was donated to the *Sasana* by the rich and the not so rich benefactors. The necessity

arose for some form of discipline in the use and management of these. Therefore elaborate codes of discipline arose regarding attitudes towards such wealth. During the life time of the Buddha too, there were certain norms that were laid down based on the needs that arose.[2]

When it became necessary for the monks to take up residence for as long as three months during the rainy season, the *Sangha* were gifted household goods and consumer requirements. It was necessary to accept these gifts (the *dana*) and to keep them for common use without any individual possession. The practice of common ownership became the basic principle. Further, detachment in life and the use of good without any attachment or possessiveness was a discipline that was very strictly maintained.

Situations of crisis in production such as food shortages, famines that affect the laity, affected the *Sangha* society too. These gave birth to organizational arrangements with necessary codes of conduct.[3] Irrespective of the wealth received, the life of the *Bhikkus* was based on the principle of living on alms and monks did not engage in any production or have any links with the productive activity in society. The people could also support and maintain the *Bhikkus* due to subsistence agriculture, the self-sufficient rural economy and the craft form of manufacture that characterized this period. What were the historical factors that made this possible?

The 6th Century (B.C.) was a period when a great social transformation was taking place in Indian society. When the Buddha was born this had already begun. The slave-owning Brahman (priestly class) society was crumbling and the emergence of a feudal society had already begun under the leadership of the Kshathriyas (warrior class). The Buddha made the severest attack on the declining slave system of society through his teachings. In attacking the power and the views of the Brahmans and the entire value system of the

Brahmana society, the Buddha was strongly supported by the Kshathriyas (warrior caste) and Vaishayas (trader caste) and the Shudras (the caste of labouring people), that is by all oppressed sections of society. The oppressed classes obtained the best possible ideology from the teachings of the Buddha in their struggle against the ideology of the dominant Brahman. Many of them entered the *Bhikku Sasana*. This is why *Dhamma* became widely accepted by the population in various regions of India and the Brahman leaders fought so vehemently against it. The Buddha did not stop at this. His struggle was not confined to this particular society transformation. He had a broader perspective and a vision which was described earlier – in the *Sutras* mentioned. Therefore the missionary campaign that the Buddha began with 60 monks was transformed into a *Sangha Sasana* according to the needs of the times, and it was made the proto type of the future *Kethumathi* social system. The *Sangha Sasana* did not have anything Utopian in its practices. The democratic traditions of this society were from those practiced by the Lichchavi Republic, which had the broadest democracy of the time. The *Sangha*-Sasana adopted the same principles of democracy, which had made the Lichchavis invincible.

The code of discipline for the *Sangha* could be described as a highly democratic constitution, without any exaggeration. It was practiced in order to have a collective rule without the use of weapons and oppressive forms of punishment. Undoubtedly there were certain features necessary for the times, but the principles were based on the concepts of the future society that was envisaged.

This *Sangha* society exists today. But the foundation of the principles of this society does not exist. We should now consider the reasons for this situation. This can be done only by examining the history of the *Sasana*, relating it to the history of the Asian societies, which is over two thousand five

hundred years old. Let us look at this briefly.

The Buddha showed us a middle path with the right understanding. He also demonstrated how truth could be seen by freeing ourselves from the extremisms and established a *Sangha* Society (a collective) acting and moving along this path. The *Sangha* society in its earlier period did not participate in the process of material production, which was based on the feudal system that had emerged recently. The people who had entered the newly formed social relationships of production undertook the task of protecting and sustaining these agents of Buddhist ideology with great devotion. This was because the above ideology had played an important missionary role in this revolutionary change.

On the other hand, the Buddha did not accept the feudal system simply because it was new. At the very beginning, the Buddha made a critique of some contradictions and inequalities in this system such as the caste discrimination. He therefore instructed the *Bhikkus* not to associate themselves with its production relationships. He clearly knew that he was not representing any form of private ownership of property, but the "*Kethumathi*" social system of the future, free of weapons of oppression and violence.

However, this aim was lost among the later generations of *Bhikkus*. They began to collaborate with the property owning class of feudals, became experts on the functions of feudalist state machinery and experts on international relations, through their involvement in cultural missions among states. They also began to enjoy dominant power in society as a result of their gaining property ownership. By becoming land owners they too began to share in state power and in the ruling class. Apart from the Kings' palaces, the highest forms of creative architecture and art are seen in Buddhist temples, viharas and the monasteries. This indicates that the *Bhikkus* were closely associated with creative artists, architects and

other craftsmen. They were themselves specialists in these fields. They were associated with the administrative machinery with the rulers in order to protect and maintain the property and the labour force that were under the control of their institutions. They were advisors to the kings. They even instructed them on military matters when necessary. As a result of their close association with the Kings' assemblies, some *Bhikkus* became scholars in the theories of administration and military affairs (the "*Ummagga Jathakaya*" one of the stories of the five hundred and fifty *Jathaka* stories is a very good illustration of this fact).

The *Bhikku* and the *Bhikku* society became an essential component of the feudalist socio-economic system and thus the early *Sangha* Society was vitiated for the first time. The next great historical transformation in the social evolution of Asia was the downfall of the feudal system and its replacement by the capitalist social system. However, this revolution was not something that obtained its sustenance from the spiritual and the cultural values created by the Asian civilization and thus it was not in accordance with the structure of the Asian society. It was during this period that all spiritual and cultural values that prevailed so far had to face the strong challenge of being re-evaluated. Asian Society was subjected to the powerful shock of the tremendous conflicts generated by the impact of the aggressive intrusion of Western Capitalism. The growth of capitalism in Asia was under the powerful pressure exerted by the invading Western Capitalism.

When all social, economic, political and cultural elements described so far began to take their capitalist form, Buddhist institutions too were subjected to this change. The *Sangha* Society, which had earlier become a feudal institution changed too. All feudalist religious traditions which were treated as sacred were devalued by the power of money. The Japanese *Bhikku* and the *Bhikku* Society can be cited as a very clear il-

lustration of the change that took place within the Asian Society as a result of capitalist transformation. The Sri Lankan *Sangha* Society too is being subjected to this change in accordance with the changes that are taking place in Sri Lankan society under the aggressive impact of Western Capitalism. However, the Sri Lankan *Bhikku* is not generally rich in his knowledge of capitalist economic theories and its principles of commerce and trade. Therefore they are not familiar with the capitalist political theory and the various philosophical trends that reflect these economic theories. The lay intellectuals stand far ahead of all religious leaders in this field. Some clergy feel that this is a field that they should not engage in.

Since capitalist development came to us in the form of an invasion, and the forces of resistance emerged from the old feudal society, some of them tend to look into the possibilities of using the traditional feudalist concepts to fight against capitalism. But as oppressive social influences generated by capitalism push them day by day into positions of helplessness, they sometimes tend to give up their counter-attack and get integrated into the system, pretending to look into possibilities of development within capitalism. Imperialist forces support this and try to propagate the myth of Development through Capitalism. When these myths are exposed they tend to look into other ways to achieve freedom. In order to do this, the inheritance from our own history is subjected to a scientific analysis. What is irrelevant is rejected and what is useful is further developed in order to present the oppressed people with a new ideology and new attitudes. We are experiencing today this dual character of the social influence of capitalism. We can see both these trends among the Sri Lankan *Bhikku*. However, he has not yet become sufficiently strong in building the counter-force to capitalism. It is important to note that a continuous effort has been growing in Sri Lanka throughout the last century in building this force.

AN EXPERIENCE IN SRI LANKA

It was the scholarly *Bhikku* who took the first steps towards the anti-imperialist struggle for national liberation in Sri Lanka in their campaign against the cultural invasion and religious oppression, which accompanied Western capitalism. Among whose who took up this struggle of the people, Venerable Hikkaduwe Sri Sumangala Nayaka Thero,Venerable Ratmalane Dhammarama Thero, Venerable Migettuwatte Gunananda Thero, Venerable Udaken-dawala Saranankara Thero, Venerable Muththettuwagama Dharmeshwara Thero, Venerable S. Mahinda Thero, a Tibetan, Venerable Kotagama Wachissara Thero, Venerable Batapola Anomadassi Nayaka Thero and Venerable Dumbara Palitha Thero were the pioneers. Ven Udakendawela Saranankara Thero and Muththettuwagama Dharmeshwara Thero had even participated directly in the struggle for independence in India and had been detained in prisons.

By January 1946, there was a great campaign and a well-known dialogue initiated by these same monks on the topic of "*Bhikkus* and Politics". Their activity in politics was the cause of this great dialogue, which spread not only among the *Bhikkus* of Sri Lanka, but also among the Buddhists in other countries. In February 1946, the teaching staff at Vidyalankara Pirivena issued the well known "*Vidyalankara Bhikku Declaration*" replying to their opponents who held the view that *Bhikkus* should not be involved in politics. Here are some extracts from this declaration.

The Buddha has permitted the *Bhikku Sangha* to change the Small and the Very Small *Kudhanu* (*Kuddhaka*) norms of discipline if and when they agree on such changes. However, there is no evidence so far about any such changes by the *Theravada Bhikkus* in their history. Neither do we say that such changes in the disciplinary norms should now be introduced.

However, we have to accept that the economic, social and the political situation that existed during the life-time of the Buddha has now changed, and that the life of the *Bhikkus* has also changed.

It is very clear that the life of the *Bhikkus* have undergone considerable change over this period as a result of this change.

We believe that all programmes for the good of the people in today's world come within the field of politics... Therefore whatever programme that is carried out for the good of the people, that would not cause damage to the *Bhikku* life, should be suitable to the *Bhikkus*, whether it is labelled as politics or otherwise.

It further says :

Bhikkus today are engaged in political activity whether they are conscious of it or not, by being involved in educational work, village rehabilitation, prevention of crime, social relief, temperance activities, and other social activities. We do not admit that it is wrong for *Bhikkus* to be engaged in such work.

We accept that it is right for the *Bhikkus* to work for the upliftment of the people and to work against the factors that obstruct their well being. For instance, it is the highest obligation of the *Bhikkus* to act against all attempts to destroy the recently introduces system of Free Education in order to ensure its survival.

Thus, by supporting all efforts made in Sri Lanka that are for social development according to our own experience and by working against all forces that oppose such development, it is possible to build peoples power against this oppressive social system. The fundamental principles of the *Sangha* Society cannot be sustained unless this counter-force is essentially against all forms of imperialism, hegemonism, feudalist traditions, capitalism and all types of oppression and suppression.

On the other hand it is impossible today to set up a collective (*Saangika*) system limited only to those committed to a *Bhikku* life. We have a legal system that establishes private

ownership of property within a capitalist system. Accordingly, the property that belongs to the temples, which is said to be for the *Sangha* (*Saangika*) is merely an institution that is subject to this legal system and serving the capitalist economy. In Sri Lanka this is an institution serving the neocolonialist economy. On the other hand the individualist character of production relationships is disappearing and is being increasingly replaced by relationships of a socialist nature. As a result, the *Sangha* Collective (*Saangika*) system advocated by Buddhism is caught in the contradiction between the private ownership of property established by the legal system and the socialized relationships that exists in the process of production. Therefore the principles of this collective system (the *Saangika*) can only be put into practice within a new set of social, economic, political and cultural relationships that would emerge through the abolition of the entire socio-economic system based on capital accumulation, which encourages and strengthens greed (*Thanha*).

II

SOCIAL INFLUENCE OF BUDDHISM

Our discussion so far on Buddhism and the *Sangha Sasana* in Asian society was centered mostly on the experience on the impact of the evolution of different social systems on *Sangha* society, and the efforts made today to change this situation. However, this was dealt with very briefly.

Unless we examine the impact of these historical events in the opposite direction, our presentation will not be complete in the face of the present challenges in social development. That is, we have to examine the impact made by the traditions and values that existed in *Sangha* society on the rest of the society over this long period of its history and at present.

Buddhism performed its mission in social development by providing the guiding ideology that was needed for the great historical social transformation that was taking place over 2,500 years ago. It also provided an abundance of spiritual values that were needed by the feudalist social system in its onward march against the system of slavery. By establishing a system of humanitarian values which became strongly rooted among people, Buddhism also made it extremely difficult for feudalism to impose non-compassionate, oppressive and a ruthless dominant rule. It provided the people with the necessary freedom of thought based on the principles of democracy which enabled them to point boldly at the mistakes of even those who shared power. It also provided the people with a strong ideology and a course of action against treating human beings according to superior and inferior categories based on caste which was a feature that feudalist society inherited from the Brahman social system. The maintenance of this new ideology and tradition was the responsibility of the generations of the *Sangha*.

THE BUDDHA AND INDIVIDUALIST LEADERSHIP

When the question arose about the person who should succeed the Buddha as leader, His answer at the death bed was that the *Sangha* should make the "*Dhamma* and discipline" their leaders. His was the first great *Dhamma* Convention in human history against individualist leadership. This was a factor that influenced not only the *Bhikku Sangha*, but also people who were inspired by it, to resist the wrong tendencies that arose as a result of individual leaderships, throughout the social history that came under the influence of Buddhism.

The history of Sri Lanka did not either see despotic rulers as there were strong peoples, resistances which completely

toppled such rulers or controlled them. The two well-known examples are the rebellion led by Sri Medhawannabhaya against Mahasen (276-303 AD) and that under the leadership of Ambanwela Rala against Rajasingha II (1635-1687 AD). King Mahasen accepting his faults and admitting that the rebels were just is an instance that is extremely rare in the entire history of Royal Governments in the world. Both these kings however, were not extremely cruel dictators. The country had achieved self-sufficiency in rice under the agricultural policies of Mahasen. Rajasingha II gave effective leadership to defeat the Portuguese invaders from the West, who practiced extreme forms of cruelty. Inspite of these the rebellions occurred during their rule due to the suppression of the social and cultural life of the people.

A RIGHTEOUS RULE

King Dutugemunu (161-137 BC) was waging just war. In order to prevent the mass killing that would result from a protracted war, he engaged in an individual confrontation with the opposing king and gained a victory. King Dutugemunu is supposed to have regretted the deaths of those who died in war throughout his lifetime. He even constructed a monument to honour his opponent who died in this battle. He did not force his people to engage in unpaid labour (as *Rajakariya*) in his construction projects of religious and cultural importance. Each worker was paid a salary.

King Buddhadasa (340-368 AD) who set up free medical centres from village to village even provided facilities to treat sick animals. Upatissa I (368-410 AD) is said to have kept up the full night once, when his bed was getting wet due to a leaky roof since he believed that it was bad to get the servants to work in the night. He is supposed to have taken his meals regularly together with ordinary people in a common dining

hall where people received alms (*Daana*), Agbo V (718-724 AD) is said to have based his rule on three basic principles:

1. Avoid improper investment
2. Avoid improper treatment
3. Avoid improper consumption

Sirisangabo (251-253 AD) who sacrificed his life to save the lives of his people and Dhatusena (459-477 AD) who had to lose his own life since he insisted that the wealth of his treasury was the water that he had conserved in the massive irrigation tanks, knowing that he would be killed if he stood by this statement, are two examples of inspiring personalities that enlighten our history.

Parakramabahu the Great (1153-1186 AD) who stated that "not a drop of water that falls should be allowed to flow into the sea without being made use of" and made a great contribution to the development of agriculture in the country by constructing great tanks and channels for irrigation is highly respected and adored by the Sri Lankan peasant.

Out of about 191 Kings who ruled Sri Lanka from ancient times, most of them except a mere handful have had qualities such as those described above. All of them tried to present themselves as a "*Bodisatva*" (that is a person who aspires and practices the perfections necessary to become a Buddha in a later life). They were encouraged to act with this concept in mind as a result of the impact made by Buddhism. Basically, the principles and policies adopted by Sri Lanka's rulers of the State were based on the Buddhist concepts.

The policies and the programmes of action of the rulers included "*Dasaraja-Dhamma*", ten principles of *Dhamma* for the rulers, and the striving to achieve the *Dasa Paramitha* (ten virtues of perfections) namely *Dana* (Generosity), *Seela* (Morality), *Nekkhamma* (Renunciation), *Panna* (Wisdom), *Virlya*

(Energy), *Kshanti* (Patience), *Sathya* (Truthfulness), *Adhittana* (Determination), *Metta* (Loving-kindness), *Upekkha* (Equanimity) and the four means of right treatment-generosity, pleasant speech, economic well-being and equality.

THE VISION THAT GUIDED OUR HISTORY

Considering not only worldly wealth, but even one's own life as secondary to the well-being of others is a social value that is not uncommon in our history. Freedom from greed (*Thanha nirodha*) and simplicity of life (*Sallahuka wuththi*) are two important positive factors that strongly influenced the socio-economic development process of the country. It was a common feature to see even the Kings, the Ministers and other leaders in the country considering the accumulation of surplus value and the enjoying of extreme forms of luxury as degrading.

Each chapter of '*Mahawamsa*', the great book of history of Sri Lanka that had been written, uninterrupted from very ancient times, ends in a verse that emphasizes the importance of a righteous rule and the impermanence of life and also stressing that there is no virtue greater than that of working for the well-being of others. The end of each chapter says that chapter ... of *Mahawamsa* was written for the serene joy and emotion of the pious.

This was the ideology and vision that the history of our country taught its people and it had a very strong impact on their lives. But this should not be mistaken to mean that the working people of the ancient Sri Lanka did not have any problems or suffer any hardship and oppression and that they lived very happy lives.[4] But Buddhism certainly had given to people many such common values that influenced their social life. They had built certain social values as common practice in their lives such as protection of common

property, appreciation of collective action, helping those who are in distress, hospitality towards strangers, compassion towards all living beings.

But as a result of the maturing of the feudalist system, the increasing influence of Hindu culture, which introduced extremist life-styles, and the impact of Western invaders, this simple life-style was subjected to a gradual process or change. Particularly after the forced introduction of the capitalist socioeconomic system of the British imperialists and under the influence of colonialist education system, the ideology of development in the country underwent a rapid and a drastic change.

IMPERIALIST DOMINATION AND DISTORTED DEVELOPMENT

The principle given in *Deegha Nikaya-3 Chakkawaththi Seehanada Suttraya* which says *"Attadeepa Viharatha, Attasarana Annanna Sarana – Dhamma Deepa Viharatha Dhamma Sarana Annanna Sarana,* that is the principle of making oneself an island and depending not on the help of others but on one's own self and making *Dhamma* an island and depending not on anything other than *Dhamma,* was given up, which means the life based on right policy and self-reliance has been suppressed and a life of dependence on other countries has replaced it. All the concepts that Buddhism emphasized have been reversed today. Selfish accumulation of wealth has replaced *Daana* (Generosity) intolerance has replaced pleasant speech. We have uneconomical wastefulness instead of a rational economic life, and large social disparities instead of equality.

As a result of the measures adopted to enhance private accumulation of wealth in the name of development of the country poverty, malnutrition, unemployment, ill-health, disease, have increased together with rapidly growing alien-

ation. Together with the old and the neo-colonialist form of capitalist development, the three principles of rule that existed in the past in our country, which were enunciated by King Agbo V, mentioned earlier, have totally disappeared. What we see throughout the country today is improper investment. This is a type of investment that is beneficial to foreign multinational companies. It is the investment that increases peoples poverty and nourishes anti-social forces. The past rulers of the country who avoided inappropriate investment were able to achieve a high standard in economic development. This is how Sri Lanka came to be known as the "Granary of the East".

But today inappropriate investment has brought extremely harmful results making Sri Lanka one of the poorest countries in the world. Instead of avoiding improper conduct, we have bribery, nepotism, granting favours to party supporters and many other forms of improper treatment and their denial to the deserving. This has led to great dissatisfaction, hatred and extreme forms of selfishness, which look for one's own interest with complete disregard for the consequences on the other. The third aspect of wasteful consumption has led to the degradation of the entire social life. This situation is seen not only in Sri Lanka but also in other Asian and non-Asian countries throughout the world that were linked to imperialism.

The five types of trade that the Buddha prohibited have become the largest profit-earning trades in today's world. The sale of deadly weapons takes the first place. The expenditure on arms production is being increased every day while millions of people die of starvation and hunger. The super powers who dominate the world have become 'sellers of death and have become the biggest obstacle to social development. Sale of narcotics and poison is not secondary to the above. The sale of narcotics comes next to the sale of arms which

brings the greatest profits within the shortest possible time. The larger share of the land throughout the world is allocated not for production of food that feeds the hungry but for producing raw materials for alcohol. Production of liquor which was considered in the past to be one of the most degrading ways of earning a living is today seen in almost every village in Sri Lanka. Coconut cultivation throughout the coastal region in Sri Lanka is being used for production of toddy, which is converted to various forms of alcohol as a Government patronized industry. Sugarcane cultivation has also been used for production of liquor.

Today, a number of Multinational Companies have formed joint State Companies together with the Government of Sri Lanka to cultivate sugarcane for sugar industry. Can we be sure that these sugar plantations will not be used more for production of liquor rather than for production of sugar in time to come? Those who are concerned more about profits than with development would tend to do so. A number of big Tobacco Multinational Companies have already covered a considerable extent of land with tobacco. They are attracting more and more vegetable and food crop farmers, particularly the small farmers, to grow tobacco in place of food crops. Tobacco brings no benefit to the country and to its people, apart from earning large profits within short periods to the Companies.

However, the religious leaders in our country have been unable to defeat these trends. Can we think of reviving Asiatic social values without defeating them? The situation is the same regarding the sale of human persons, animals and meat, which were condemned by Buddhism. Labour market is one of the means by which the greatest profits are earned. It is not better than those mentioned earlier. Slave trade was an important business activity in the past. Today it has taken the form of sale of labour. In this trade, human relationships have

been greatly degraded and it has become a great obstacle to the development of productive forces. Labour when sold cheap result in a great loss to society. In Sri Lanka too, the sale of cheap migrant labour to the Middle-East, which has expanded tremendously over the recent years, has led to serious destruction in social life and this question has led to a great commotion in our society. With the coming of Multinational Companies into the country, labour is offered cheap and in abundance. This has become lucrative business to some while creating serious confusion in the social relationships. The sale of flesh of animals is an activity that needs careful reconsideration at least in the context of the Asian social value system, whatever may be its validity in the cold climatic regions of the West. When the required balance between the environment, the animals and human beings and the need for survival of animals is given due consideration, it is important to rethink whether the sale of meat should be allowed and promoted as a means of profit making.

MODELS INFLUENCING SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Although there have been such specific tendencies, imperialist capitalism has not succeeded in completely uprooting the foundations of the Asian societies. However, a leap forward in Asian social development has been prevented for many centuries as a result of its subjection to the growth of 'Western' capitalism. During this period, an abundance of social values that Asian civilization could have contributed to the process of world development, stopped in their growth. If feudalist Asia moved forward in its own evolution and growth, advancing through capitalism in its own way, this situation may have changed. But this growth did not occur according to an Asian model.

If at all, this occurred only in Japan, although China en-

gaged in this effort in 1911, no free growth of capitalism was possible due to the already present impact of Western capitalism. The contradictions were created due to the interaction between the growth of capitalism internally, the inability of the weakening feudalist system to face the threat of Western imperialism, the influence made by a number of imperialist forces on China, the growth of forces of liberation within China together with the new thinking generated by the 1917 October revolution resulted in China moving out of the direct path of capitalist development on to a new path.

This new orientation is making a tremendous impact on the formation of Asian societies and it will add a new wealth of experience to Asia in the effort to free itself from the clutches of Western capitalism and towards building a new society based on the principle of self-reliance. Inspite of the tendencies that are seen today within the entire movement for liberation in China, to swing to the left and to the right from time to time, China with an ancient Asian civilization and an unbroken history would make a great contribution to the rest of the world by scientifically upgrading the essence of its Asian cultural and spiritual heritage. In the meanwhile, development of the Indian region has forced a tragic fate in face of imperialist influences. So far no liberation movement wither religious or social in nature has succeeded in emerging as capable of overcoming the many racial divisions and other conservative forces in its society. However, when the immense historical heritage of this regional society with its tremendous spiritual values obtains the necessary impulse to find free expression the momentum of the creative forces of this region will over-throw the reactionary Brahman forces that suppress them, and would shine as the new sun of liberation upon the entire world community.

On the other had, Japan that moved ahead independently along a path of capitalist development could not free it-

self fully from the contradictions and disturbances created by the impact of Western capitalism. Japan, which had a craving to reach the highest peak along the capitalist path disregarded her religious and cultural inheritance and finally brought in extremely destructive results upon itself and on the neighbouring world by engaging in a fascist course of action. Japan was the Asian country that obtained the most shocking results and experiences from World War II. When the fate of the civilization that Japan built independently is being subjected to a serious challenge as a result of its imperialist course of action, the fascist tendency, and by being the laboratory for testing the atom bomb, it would be extremely important not only for Asia but also for the entire world to carefully examine how the Japanese have synthesized these experiences for themselves.

The end of Second World War was an ideal occasion for Japan to have examined historically the experience of the Emperor Asoka, who ruled in India a long time ago. Asoka was disillusioned with life as a result of the great destruction to human life caused by the Kalinga War. The way of the Buddha guided Asoka to understand life and to become a humanitarian. His greatest transformation was to understand that if his motherland India could contribute anything to the world, it was not the greatness in war but the greatness of *Dhamma* (that conquering of the world should not be through war but through *Dhamma*). We, a very small island in Asia and a people who possess a culture formed under the influence of Buddhism, would like to direct this question to the people of Japan. Have you, as a nation that has Buddhism as your cultural inheritance, looked back at the living experience of the great destruction to human life caused by World War II? The victorious Indian emperor Dharmasoka gave up the ideal of victory through war and started serving the people through aspiring for victory through *Dhamma*, and he

devoted all the wealth that had been amassed in his treasury to the good of the people. It is said that he finally had only had a Nelli fruit, which he gave to the *Bhikkus* near him. Japan an Asian country, which is still aspiring for a capitalist future should look at this historical lesson of Dharmasoka.

UNDERSTANDING THE PRESENT WORLD SITUATION

Though there are regional differences as discussed above, the formation of Asian societies and their evolution is not independent of the world situation. In what way does Buddhism help us to clarify this aspect? The principles that the Buddha preached in his first sermon helps us to understand the world situation and to find our way towards changing the same. As preached by the Buddha, the world as a whole has divided itself to two extremes. There is a group of countries that have achieved a great development in the material sense. At the other extreme are the countries of Asia, except Japan and the other under-developed countries of the Third World. The developed countries, through imperialism, are suppressing the Third World and its peoples. They exploit raw materials and human labour from the Third World and the world's capital accumulates only in the hands of a few powerful states, while poverty grows in its extreme forms in the Third World countries. The production of commodities for luxurious consumption by the developed countries has led to a life style similar to that described by Buddha as "*Kamasukallikanu yogi*" while the extreme lack of essential goods, preventing the meeting of basic needs, has created the other extreme form of life described as "*Attakilamathanu yogi*". The world society is thus divided.

This world socio-economic system has also created the extreme ideologies as its reflection. They also appear as ideologies for the liberation from social suffering. In some places

in the world today there are extreme ideologies that hope to achieve liberation by inflicting suffering on the human body. There are some religious sects that avoid medicine when sick believing that death would bring liberation. In Great Britain, we hear of groups such as the "Exit Society", who commit suicide to be liberated. There are the Yogis of the Indian tradition who practice extreme forms of self-discipline remaining for long periods in one physical position. Sometimes we see some Western intellectuals too being attracted by these. Such Yogi societies have been formed in some places.

There are also those who try to please their senses for liberation through use of narcotic drugs together with ideological trends that correspond to these practices. There are societies of hippies who take very expensive drugs such as LSD, Marijuana, Heroin to experience a state of liberation. They say drugs help them in better meditation. There are others travelling around the world seeking various pleasures and they have corresponding ideologies. But none of these extremes can change the world situation. While it is wrong to believe that the world situation cannot be changed and adheres to the traditional religious or ideological extremes, it would be equally wrong to take up adventurist extremes with the hope of changing the world situation.

THE APPROACH TOWARDS SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

We have to reject all extremist ideologies. Rejecting them involves the rejection of the life styles of extreme luxury and of extreme suffering that generate these ideologies. Rejection of these extreme forms of life means the building of a new order for the liberation of human-kind. That would be a middle path which avoids the extremes. This is not something located in between the two extremes, but a rejection of both.

For this the middle path that the Buddha described

would provide the necessary guidance when understood in the present context. The elements of the path for liberation for the present world population too would be the right views, right aspirations, right speech, right action, right living, right effort, right thought and concentration.

The world history has moved forward step by step, from time to time, towards changing the world that was reflected by the above extremes, and the first step towards the changing of the present world in order to build a new world was taken in 1917. Our people today have learnt the lessons of the experiences of success and failure of the liberation movement that moved forward from that point, and they have gained strength by it. Therefore what has to be done today is to reject the capitalist economic system, which is decomposing and to build a *"Saangika"* system of property ownership and a *Sangha* society, which is the same as that which existed prior to the first rejection, but which is of a broader base and material strength.

A model of such a society can be established today in its total sense in one political unit, that is in one country. But the people of that country will have to go through an extremely difficult task to protect such a unit until the entire humankind accepts such a model. This is proved by the international experience of the modern time from 1917.

This experience is totally in accordance with the Buddha's preachings in *Chakkawaththi Seehanada Suthraya*. This model in fact would not begin simultaneously in all places, but would be from one country. Then it would gradually spread to the whole world with the first country as its pilot. This growth is mentioned in the *Sutra* as follows :

O *Bhikkus*, in the city of Benares there would be a kingdom named Kethumathi, which would be prosperous, wealthy and highly populated, with an abundance of food. O *Bhikkus*, in this land of India,

there would be eighty-four thousand cities which would take *Kethumathi* as its model and the guide.

A righteous King Chakrawarthi would be born in this kingdom.

They would then live in peace and justice throughout this earth that has the great seas as their boundaries.

The vision of the Buddha about the future is truly in accordance with the march of history. It would not be a kingdom of heaven that would come down suddenly, neither is it a magic world that could be built overnight. It is a society that would start forming in the City of Benares and spread out to the land of India, and then to the whole of the earth. One may raise the question why it did not originate in Asia. We have already discussed the historical reasons for this deviation. A thinker would speak about the future possibilities and the course of action generally starting from one's own setting and environmental situation. Both Karl Marx and Engels first thought that socialism would overcome capitalism starting from Europe. But it emerged from Russia and did it not turn towards under-developed Asia without spreading towards Europe?

However, it is our task to make this a reality. It is our historical mission and the social responsibility.

CONCLUSION

Asian society has now gained a wealth of experience in relation to this. But Asia will not succeed in building a new society outside the foundation that its ancient civilization and culture has constructed. There is a contradiction that awakening Asia has to resolve between its many centuries old historical development and the period of stagnation over a century that occurred due to the impact of aggressive capitalism from the West.

The resolution of this historical contradiction would be possible with the contribution of the new scientific thought and the ability to correctly absorb what is valuable in the old. Buddhism would be able to provide a powerful source of guidance in resolving the above contradiction in order to create a new Asian social model.

I think it is opportune for me to end this talk by quoting to you from a speech that the Late Sri Lankan Bishop, Lakshman Wickremesinghe made in Bangalore, India in 1981 at the Christian Conference of Asia Assembly. During this talk, he quoted from the Russian Marxist Parfionovich, which I would repeat before you:

Well, did not Lenin say that Marxism, far from repudiating the past, should absorb and work on it as the only sure foundation of a proletarian culture? Who can deny that Budhism has been not simply a religion but a way of life for millions. That its cultural and historical values have moulded the spiritual heritage of mankind.

NOTES

1. The *Maha Nidana Sutra* included in the *Digha Nikaya* of the *Sutra Pitaka* provides another example. A special feature of this *Sutra* is its analysis of social problems in terms of cause and effect according to the theory of "dependent origination". To quote one instance: Ananda, thus feeling does beget desire. Desire leads to search (of the object of attachment). Search leads to gain (of the objects of attachment). Gain leads to estimation (the good or bad results of the objects of attachment). Estimation leads to attraction (towards the objects estimated). Attraction leads to personal identification (as I and mine). Personal identification leads to possession (ownership consequent to desire and false belief). Possession leads to greed. Greed leads to protection. Protection required clubs and weapons, creates quarrels, opposition, arguments, altercations, gossip, lying and other puerile evil consequences.

"Ananda, therefore, finds clubs, weapons, quarrels, opposition, arguments, altercations, gossip, lying and other evil consequences have protection of possessions as their sole cause, sole origination, sole basis, sole support" (*Digha Nikaya*, 2 p. 87, from *Buddha Jayanti*, Sinhala translation).

Thus has the Buddha explained the origin of social crises, according to the theory of Dependent Origination. This will be clear if one examines how, as a result of certain methods adopted by *Bhikku* Dhaniya (a potter's son) to construct a temple, the Buddha had to take suitable action and lay down the second rule (in Parajika Pali in the *Vinaya Pitaka*.) decreeing it unworthy of *Bhikkus* to build well finished houses etc. even for personal residence. Another example is the method approved by the Buddha for the construction of hemitages for *Bhikkus*. Vide : *Senasanakkanda* in the *Chullavagga Pali* in *Vinaya Pitaka*.

2. There was a famine in the city of Rajagaha. As a result, the *Sangha* had to face great difficulties in obtaining their requirements. For there was a shortage of provisions and irregular distribution of what was available. In the *Senasana Khandaka* of the *Chullavagga Pali* in the *Vinaya Pitaka*, a long description is given of a system of distribution organized with the Buddha's approval. The following are extracts showing the reason for the creation of this organized system and the democratic way in which responsibilities were assigned.

"63. At that time, the six monks (The group of six Editor) were taking for themselves the better food and giving the worthless to the other monks. The Buddha was informed of this.

"Monks, if there be one that does no evil by own choice or by hate or by ignorance or by fear and also knows who has claimed and who has not, such a monk having these five qualities do I approve to be selected as *Bhattuddesaka* (Rice Receiver). Monks such selection should be made in the following manner : Firstly, a Monk should be invited to accept selection as *Bhattuddesaka*. Thereafter an eloquent and authoritative monk should be made to announce to *Sangha* as follows:"

"Venerable Sirs, I seek your attention. If the *Sangha* are all here assembled they shall select Venerable so and so as *Bhattuddesaka*. So do I announce.

"Venerable Sirs, I wish to be heard. The *Sangha* are to select Venerable so and so as *Bhattuddesaka*. Those of you who approve the se-

lection of Venerable so and so as *Bhattuddesaka*, may remain silent. Those who do not approve may speak.

"Monk so and so has been selected as *Bhattuddesaka* by the consent of the *Sangha*. Hence the silence, so do I understand."

Then, the *Bhattuddesakta* monk thought : How should the rice be distributed? The Buddha was consulted.

"Monk, I approve the drawing of lots for the distribution of rice. The names may be written on pieces of eakel or stripes and enclosed and mixed and then drawn", said the Buddha.

Similarly, for all matters, big or small, affecting the *Sangha*, persons suitable for the task are selected and appointed, as for example in : 64. Allocator of Seats; 65. Treasurer; 66. Robe Receiver; 67. Robe Distributor; 68. Gruel Distributor, Fruit Distributor, 69. Short Eats Distributor; 70. Minor Personal Requirements Distributor; 71. Provider of Rainwear; 72. Overseer of Temple Staff and Supervisor of Novice *Bhikkus*.

3. The description given to Prince Anuruddha about the way rice is created," vide-Chapter 19 of the *Pujavaliya*, regarded as written during the Dambadeniya period, provide a clear view of the life and work of peasants of that day. It is also a sharp reply to some who try to assert glibly that there was prosperity in the past and that the people lived a contended life. The Author of *Pujavali*, describing step by step the vicissitudes of peasant life, summarizes the facts as follows :

"... When examined, the peasant never enjoyed a free day. When ill, they couldn't earn a livelihood. Even when in employment, they couldn't earn their meals for they couldn't finish their work in industry. So, with crutches under both arms, with a shabby look caused by shameful rags and hunched, they have to go from door to door, like some caricature in masks, begging in that country where they once did earn their livelihood."

Robert Knox's notes on his imprisonment show how the above situation had worsened so much that during the time of the Kandyan Kingdom the peasants were burdened with debt. Knox was a special prisoner of King Rajasinghe 2, in the second half of the 17th century. This is what he states about peasant debt.

"I began to set up a new trade ... which was to lend one corn, the benefit of which is fifty per cent per annum. He that useth this Trade must watch when the debtor's field is ripe and claim his due in

time, otherwise other creditors coming before will seize all upon the account of their debts and leave no corn at all for those that come later. For those that come thus a borrowing, generally carry none of their corn home when it is ripe for their creditors ease them of their labour by coming into their fields and taking it and commonly they have not half enough to pay what they owe ..." (*A Historical Relation of Ceylon*, knox, Tisara Publication, p. 281).

PART THREE

CHRISTIANITY

5

CHRISTIANITY IN THE CAUSE OF LIBERATION

Errol D'Lima

Religion is seen to be a means of personal liberation. It is seen as the path of *moksa* (Hinduism), the road to *nirvana* (Buddhism), the way to surrender oneself to God (Islam), an instrumental cause of salvation (Christianity). Most often, religions centre on the individual person, whether he or she acts out of correct motives, whether one's relationship to God produces merit and happiness for oneself and whether one can obtain full self-realization. The context within which an individual person lives and functions is seen to be no more than a stage upon which the self-constituted performer acts out his/her part. And while it is true that no religion disregards one's obligations to one's neighbour, still the structure of relationship between the self and the others is considered to be contiguous at the most, not constitutive of the self's liberation.

Today's world which enshrines social concern, views liberation as not confined to the individual self, important as it is, but also as present in the social structures within which the self-operates. For instance, to claim that one can be a free person in an excessively policed and totalitarian state will give pause for question : does one's liberated existence extend only as far as one's bodiliness? If so, then even in the most stable and persistent state of oppression, we should find no diffi-

culty in gleefully affirming ourselves as liberated beings, and our reason for saying so would be that the other is quite inconsequential for conditioning the self at the depth level.

If the self is seen not as one entity opposed to the others around it but as intrinsically linked to and participating in the world of persons, then it follows that liberation cannot be claimed for the self to the exclusion or disregard of the others. In short, liberation must be seen as present in the structures of society and not only in the individual self of the person who follows his/her particular *sadhana*. A corollary to this is that if religion is truly to effect the emancipation of the individual self, it must, at the same time, concern itself about the transformation of the social structures surrounding the individual self.

My aim in this paper is to demonstrate that religion is a potent force in the pursuit of liberation for and in today's world. I hope to do this by examining the phenomenon of Christianity in terms of its Biblical roots and its historical evolution. Biblically and historically, Christianity does manifest, sometimes less clearly perhaps, the dynamics which contribute to the realization of liberation. And these dynamics are Incarnation and Prophetism.

Before examining the phenomenon of Christianity, it would be appropriate to discuss if religion as such can truly further the course of liberation as understood today, for not merely individual person but sociological structures too come under its purview. In fact, a Marxist critique of history would see organized religion as a traitor to the cause of human emancipation and therefore to liberation in general. Such a critique finds its expression in the saying: religion is the opium of the people, in that it dulls people's perception even to the extent of causing them to forget the chains that bind or the oppression which they endure.

The problem could be re-stated in the following way: if the self can be constituted without reference to another then emancipation of the self becomes a totally internalized experience and does not require external parameters to indicate such emancipation. If however, the self is constituted by relationship to the other – a model that is prevalent in the 20th century in the wake of phenomenology and existentialism of the Heideggerian variety – then both the self and the context must become the subjects of emancipation for they constitute one whole: a single human phenomenon.

We may also add that the Marxist critique overlooks the fact that if there are ambiguities in the functioning of religion through the ages, no less are there ambiguities in the Marxist analysis of world history, for in every historical movement the privileged moment of foundation suffers from the oftentimes faltering if not subversive process of routinization.

Secondly, in India, the practical experience of different religious communities living together has not been altogether happy : communal conflagrations have erupted with a sickening regularity. The aftermath of each of these has brought about a greater arrogance in the name of religion and a nameless fear in the interests of survival. In the context of religion, it would seem that the goals of liberation become more distant than ever.' Could the answer to this fact of experience lie in the prior sin of our having prostituted religious fervour and identity at the altar of political or economic expediency? If so, religion is not to be blamed.

Thirdly, religion is meant to offer its adherents a vision of the world in which they live so as to give meaning to their everyday existence. Frequently, religion is spoken of in terms of fulfilment, self-realization, salvation. In today's India, not only Hinduism which is professed by the majority community but also Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, etc. offer their ad-

herents a vision of life. In each of these religious communities, certain observable parameters are present. These would be rituals, beliefs, rules and religious traditions in general which affect the lives of persons and shape them into a closely integrated community. Such a closely-knit community possesses shared goals, values and a culture which constitute it as a well-motivated group and hence a potent force in the task of nation-building. A concerted action by such groups would be conducive towards the realization of socialist ideals which are enshrined in the Indian Constitution. Such action would be the direct result of a religious group sharing common commitments and concerns. However, the existence of different religious groups in the same nation contributes less towards a consolidated national community and more to a disintegrating nation'. For here, the danger of each religious community forming a self-enclosed and isolated sociological units is more than a mere possibility. Can religion be presumed to further the cause of liberation when it seems to fan the flames of parochialism? May not the minority status of one community which religion puts paid to, argue the preponderance of one group's rights and freedom over others? Perhaps the answer to this problem lies in effecting a national unity which is supra-religious or discovering true religious values which have been buried under the clays of worldly objectives masquerading as religious.'

Finally, it has been argued that the very concept of religion is self-contradictory; it professes to bring about the liberation of men and women but in fact it enslaves them by esoteric ordinances, obscurantist ideals and tyrannical domination. This happens because human beings have mistaken their basic self-consciousness for religion, the divine and the supra-human. Emancipation will occur, it is opined, when religion is divested of its other worldly leanings and is referred to the

secular situation of men and women in their present context. Ludwig Feuerbach describes this position thus:

> The necessary turning-point of history is therefore the open confession, ... the ... consciousness of the species; that man can and should raise himself only above the limits of his individuality, and not above the laws, the positive essential conditions of his species; that there is no other essence which man can think, dream of, imagine, feel, believe in, wish for, love and adore as the absolute, than the essence of human nature itself. [1]

The issue raised here is not easily resolved. Should one reduce religion to the limits of human consciousness, he/she has unwittingly reduced the totality of the human phenomenon to a mono-dimensional significance. To keep on discerning the absolute in religion is the best way of preventing the human from arrogating to itself the prerogatives of the divine. Yet it cannot be gainsaid that the Enlightenment in the 18th century arose in the context of a religious tradition. In fact, the present day interest in liberation theology – a Christian phenomenon which saw its origin in the South American context owes its existence to the prophetic dimension which Christianity provided.

It would be correct to state that while religion possesses in itself the ambiguities which often obscure its true function, there is enough justification to discern elements within Christianity itself which, if examined, reveal themselves as effective factors for liberation. In this paper, I shall use Christianity as an example of religion which could further the cause of liberation.

My hope is that what is discovered in Christianity will also have echoes in other religions, for I assume that all religions are deeply concerned with the liberation of human beings.

BIBLICAL ROOTS OF LIBERATION IN CHRISTIANITY

In the Judaeo–Christian tradition, the watershed of liberation is the event referred to in the book of Exodus. In essence, this was an event through which a people gained their freedom through a historical action of God on their behalf. The Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt and under the leadership of Moses, some-time between 1350-1200 B.C., were delivered from their Egyptian masters. This even was given pride of place in the religious traditions of the Jews. At the time of the Passover Feast, which the Jews celebrate, the following is recounted so that succeeding generations of Jews may recognize and acknowledge the God who saved them from oppression:

> A wandering Aramean was my father; and he went down into Egypt and sojourned there, few in number; and there he became a nation, great, mighty and populous. And the Egyptians treated us harshly, and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard bondage. Then we cried to the Lord, our God of our fathers, and the Lord heard our voice, and saw our affliction, our toil, and our oppression; and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, with great terror, with signs and wonders; and he brought us into this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. (Exodus 26/5-9).

Already here, it is clear that this central creedal formula dwells on the subject of political liberation which will be the starting point for various religious traditions to develop among the Jewish people.

At the start of his public ministry, Jesus comes to the synagogue in Nazareth and describes his mission in the world by echoing the liberation theme of Exodus. He does this by reading from the prophet Isaiah:

> The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,
> because he has anointed me to
> preach good ones to the poor.
> He has sent me to proclaim release
> to the captives
> and recovering of sight to the blind,
> to set at liberty those who are oppressed,
> to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.
> (Lk 4/18-19).

The sequel to this passage is reported in solemn fashion:

> And he (Jesus) began to say to them,
> "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing.
> (Lk 4/21).

Jesus characterizes his mission as one that proclaims liberation.

The social concern for those who are disadvantaged or oppressed is often alluded to in the Bible as a whole. In the Old Testament, prophets call the people of Israel back to their covenantal relationship and issue denunciations against those who exploit the misery of the poor. Speaking in God's name, the prophet Amos says:

> I will turn your feasts into mourning,
> and all your songs into lamentation; .... (8/5).

He promises such retribution to those who deal deceitfully with false balances, but 'the poor for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals', and 'sell the refuse of the wheat' (Amos 8/5-6). In general the concern for the destitute shown by some prophets emerged from the changed social and political scene that obtained when Israel became a nation made up of the haves and the have-nots:

The state with its taxation and its civil service had brought about a further disintegration of the old social order within the tribes of Israel. In this connection, the transference of the focal point of the economy to the towns was a particular blow. The great landowners, who already lived in the towns, gained control over the country people, and the result was severe social injustice .... The country people became increasingly part of a proletariat.[2]

In the New Testament, we find the Letter of James upbraiding those who discriminate between the rich and the poor in social life:

.... If a man with gold rings and in fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, "Have a seat here, please," while you say to the poor man, "Stand there." or, "Sit at my feet", have you not made distinctions among yourselves, and become judges with evil thoughts? (James 2/2-4).

The Biblical texts which undergird the theme of liberation express concern very pointedly for those who suffer economic, social and political distress. Further, it is not as though an abstract religious principle exists emphasizing concern for one's neighbour to which an accidental corollary is added of focusing concern on him/her if poor. Rather, texts remind one that to be related to God is to do justice to one's suffering neighbour.

In the Biblical context then, religion is not seen as an adjunct, a second-storey added to the social, economic and political life of people, but as something that is realized and authenticated in each of these spheres of human living. One is considered as being faithful to God's covenant precisely in the carrying out of one's social obligations to those who are needy. One brings about the emancipation of the suffering, the poor and the oppressed and in doing so he/she is seen as

practising religion authentically.

LIBERATION IN THE HISTORY OF THE CHURCH

From early times, the Church proclaimed the gospel of Jesus as a message of freedom. One may wonder why this message of freedom was mostly addressed to the individual in the main. According to Aloysius Pieris, it was the Stoic influence in Rome which succeeded in limiting this message of freedom to the individual person:

> The Stoic perception which is the ideological substratum of Roman theology, sees liberation primarily as spiritual / personal / interior. It does, however, tolerate an individual's search for freedom from external social structures that are enslaving – as exemplified in the case of slavery. But it does not envisage any radical change of social structures. The Roman theology which Christianized Stoic ethics, goes further. It clearly mitigates, with Christian love, the social antagonisms between the various divisions of society. Moreover, it also earnestly pleads for changes of evil social structures. But it clearly upholds that such structural change is secondary to, and a consequence of, interior spiritual liberation achieved through love.[3]

It is not as though the Church was interested only in saving the spiritual interiority of persons. The arts and sciences did flourish and creativity on the part of Christians spawned innumerable inventions. Structures in society existed and changed with the passage of time: the concept of Christendom testifies to awareness on the part of the Church as well as the State, of a common purpose in the ordering of society, and of concern for the welfare of men and women in general. But sociological patterns in society wherein some lived as 'proletariat' and others as 'masters' were understood by the Church to be the effect of natural circumstances or even the

will of God ! The doctrine of the 'divine right of kings' is of a piece with such considerations. When in the 18th century, the winds of change began to blow and nationalism began to assert itself in the American and French Revolutions, when the concept of the Christian State was called into question, the Church failed to understand the true import of these events. She reacted by roundly condemning socialism, portraying revolutions as anti-Christian and terming the secular state as atheistic.

It required a person like Karl Marx (1818-83), the great 'master of suspicion' to demonstrate that the bourgeoise and the proletariat in society were not the effect of chance factors but of market forces which were being manipulated by the ruling class. Marx had struck a blow for the working class and the Church could not but afford to take note of his contribution to the emancipation of the working class. The social teaching of the Church began to be enunciated in accents of the working class a few years after Marx's death.[4] And what began as Christian moral teaching became a well-respected theological stance in the 20th century: liberation theology.[5]

For the liberation theologian, the emancipation which God brings to the poor and the powerless, includes a religious dimension: in the experience of freedom from alienation, hunger, injustice or political servitude, individuals must also realize their personal freedom which includes the love of God and neighbour.

Today, liberation theology is acknowledged in the Church as an authentic way of reflecting on the message of Jesus Christ and of drawing appropriate conclusions which further human emancipation. The Vatican has issued two documents on the subject. The first was issued in 1984 and was entitled: "*Instruction on Certain Aspects of Theology of Liberation*". While calling attention to some incorrect under-

standings of liberation theology, the document says:

> ... It is important that numerous Christians, whose faith is clear and who are committed to live the Christian life in its fullness, become involved in the struggle for justice, freedom and human dignity because of their love for their disinherited, oppressed and persecuted brothers and sisters. More than ever, the Church intends to condemn abuses, injustices and attacks against freedom, wherever they occur and whoever commits them. She intends to struggle, by her own means, for the defence and advancement of the rights of mankind, especially the poor.[6]

The second document "*Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*" was issued in 1986 and was intended to "highlight the main elements of the Christian doctrine on freedom and liberation". In this document, the Church clearly states that "freedom demands conditions of an economic, social, political and cultural kind which makes possible its full exercise.[7]"

DYNAMICS FOR LIBERATION

Enough has been said to show that the Christian tradition possesses, in its Biblical foundations as well as in its recent historical development, a liberation thrust. This thrust was not discernible in its present form during the originary phase of Christianity, but this absence must be coupled with the fact that the growth of social awareness intensified with the rise of an industrialized society. Further, ideologies in earlier centuries had to reckon with the absence of well-developed and formulated social sciences. Today, we are all heirs of the post-naivety phase which has followed the publication of *Das Capital*. No longer can Christianity distance itself from the social structures in community; salvation must affect the individual and the context. Christianity realizes that the authentic conditions for achieving the emancipation of the indi-

vidual are tied up with the whole and hence emancipatory structures as a whole need to be created.

If a comprehensive understanding of liberation includes a preferential option for the poor, attainment of political freedom, equal economic and social opportunities, responsible decision-making at various levels and an awareness that no human enterprise is to be absolutized, then we should say that Christianity – in spite of the ambiguities which we have noted above – does possess the dynamics which would bring these about. The dynamics are Incarnation and Prophetism.

INCARNATION

Christianity has less to do with a set of doctrines than with a person: Jesus Christ. A perusal of the New Testament uncovers its leit-motif: in the words and deeds of Jesus Christ God was manifesting himself in the world of persons. For the Christian, the experience of Jesus is written into every feature of his/her life. Validation of this experience always occurs in a community of persons.

Christianity cannot be conceived without a community of persons. Jesus was a historical person. Born like others of a human mother, he lived his life of faith and discovered his unique vocation to do God's will even to the death of the cross. By living his life with others and through prayer, he encountered the transcendent God whom he witnessed in the historical events in the world. Jesus interacted with a group of persons (the first century apostolic community) in such a way that they acclaimed him as their leader and ended by believing him to be God's accredited representative.

Throughout his life, the community remained the privileged context and medium through which God manifested himself to the people of that time. The gospel narratives

which tell of the life that Jesus led were written down and they formed the accounts found in the New Testament of the Bible. Already in the Old Testament, we can observe the importance of the community in understanding and preserving God's revelation during the patriarchal period:

> We first encounter Israel in Palestine as a confederation of twelve tribes (an amphictyony). Within this amphictyony Israel's sacred traditions and institutions developed and achieved normative form.[8]
>
> If God (Yahweh) is seen as establishing his covenant with human persons, it is because they symbolize the corporate personality of the Jewish people, that is, an individual is seen as chosen for the sake of the community (Deut 7/6; Gen 13; Exodus 19):
>
> A covenant meant the union – indeed the unification – of two parties who had previously been independent but were now to be regarded as a single entity.
>
> Israel was a single people, a nation, and she had achieved her unity, indeed her existence, through union with Yahweh.[9]

In effect, this means that the Christian does not 'prepare' himself/herself for a transcendental experience of the divine. Rather, he/she already experiences the divine in a community context and then elaborates *the apriori* conditions for such an experience. Further, the Christian eschews religious experience that is described as 'the flight of the alone to the alone' (Lotinus). The world of persons is constitutive of his/her experience of God.

Hence, when the Christian professes belief in God, he/she does not affirm a mere nameless supernatural force, a power beyond compare, a supreme transcendence, but an Incarnate God who takes his place through and in the world of persons. When Jesus proclaims freedom, he offers it to persons and society as a whole. In the past, the Church has always been wary of an experience of God which claimed to be

purely internal (individual). Gnosticism attempted to separate the Christian experience of God from its intimate link with worldly reality; it professed the following:

.... a rejection of the concrete present; a 'flight' into the sphere of the divine, reached by philosophical knowledge and by asceticism (and pictured in speculations about spirits and angels); .....[10]

It was condemned by the Church as anti-Christian.

Christianity does include elements of a reflective, interiorized and self-purificatory experience of God, and different groups of contemplatives have exemplified such an experience, e.g., Anthony the hermit (251-356), john of the Cross (1542-1591). Teresa of Avila (1515-1582), but contemplation is never to be identified with the abandonment of the world and its history.

In the commandment to love others, Jesus teaches that loving one's neighbour is the condition for loving God. He uses two texts from the Bible to illustrate the intimate link between God and one's neighbour:

Given the then current Jewish technique of interpreting one biblical text by means of another . .., the addition of Lev 19/18 to Dt 6/5 may well have been intended by Jesus as a way of interpreting the text from Deuteronomy ... Jesus would be saying that to love God with all one's heart means in fact to love one's neighbour as oneself. (45) According to the New Testament, then, to do good to the neighbour is to love God, indeed it is the only way we can love God genuinely and without illusion. That is why the correct formulation of the love commandment of the New Testament will not be 'love God' (as the rabbis would have said), nor 'love neighbour' (as the humanists would say today), nor even 'love God and neighbour' (as Christians have traditionally understood Jesus to have said). The true form of the love commandment of Jesus is that we 'love God IN the neighbour" (p. 49).[11]

The Incarnation supposes an experience of transcendence in the world of persons, which means that neither individual persons nor persons included within the sociological structures are expendable. It is for this reason that the Church sees little justification in an effort towards liberation which assumes class warfare as the guiding principle. Class warfare, if made into an inexorable condition for forming an egalitarian society, disregards personal freedom and other personal interactions. The thrust towards liberation must not espouse collectivism:

..... Neither the State nor any Society must ever substitute itself for the initiative and responsibility of individuals and of intermediate communities at the level on which they can function, nor must they take away the room necessary for their freedom. Hence the Church's social doctrine is opposed to all forms of collectivism.[12]

Incarnation implies a mediated transcendence which allows persons to encounter each other in freedom. This remains the ideal which the Church's liberation theology acclaims; but at the same time, acknowledging the complexity in the world of persons and the structures, the Church wants to safeguard both the personal and the communitarian:

The priority given to structures and technical organisation over the person and the requirements of his dignity is the expression of a materialistic anthropology and is contrary to the construction of a just social order.

On the other hand, the recognized priority of freedom and of conversion of heart in no way eliminates the need for unjust structures to be changed. It is therefore perfectly legitimate that those who suffer oppression on the part of the wealthy or the politically powerful should take action, through morally licit means, in order to secure structures and institutions in which their rights will be truly respected.[13]

PROPHETISM

In himself, the prophet is a person who is obliged to communicate to people a message which they may not be willing to hear; he is also the person who reads correctly the signs of the time and interprets authentically the meaning of events which affect the lives and history of individuals or nations. The religious prophet is one who experiences a certain assurance given him by God so that he may perform a 'non-institutional' task. Jeremias, the Old Testament prophet who is afraid to accept his role as prophet is assured by God as follows:

> Do no say, 'I am only a youth';
> for to all to whom I send you you shall go,
> and whatever I command you you shall speak,
> Do not afraid of them,
> for I am with you to deliver you, says the Lord
>
> (Jer 1/7-8)

To society at large, the prophet is a man sent by God with a commission and he challenges the status quo in the light of a religious tradition or imperative. And he does this with no concern for his personal safety or interest.

> The prophet .... always comes forward with a new message. He has to produce his own credentials. His task cannot be, strictly speaking institutionalized. Where mention is made of 'disciples of the prophet', these are followers and assistants, but not really prophets in the course of formation. Hence the uniqueness of his vocation is essential to the prophet. He is the envoy of God. He is always to some extent the religious revolutionary, and since religion and society form a unity, he is often the critic of society speaking in the name of his God.[14]

In the Old Testament, some of the prophets are noted for

their social consciousness. It is not as though they had performed a social analysis of society and felt that redress must be sought. They were conscious of a morality that stung their conscience in the social conditions prevailing. The prophets recognized that the poor and the destitute existed because of the greed of others. And poverty was not romanticized by the prophets, even if simple living was:

> Poverty was never sentimentalized by the prophets of Israel; in keeping with the rest of the Old Testament, they regarded it as an undesirable thing. The poor man was not just because he was poor, but the existential fact could not be ignored that poverty and injustice were frequent companions. It was the evil of other men that had created this situation, and the whole prophetic effort was directed against the evil.[15]

Jesus, like the prophets of old, is a non-institution person. The gospels do not describe him as belonging to a priestly class nor do they refer to him as a priest occupying a public office. Jesus is more properly described as a prophet ("And when he entered Jerusalem, all the city was stirred, saying, 'Who is this'? And the crowds said, 'This is the prophet Jesus from Nazareth of Galilee." Matt 21/10-11). To the consternation of the orthodox, Jesus does not hesitate to cure a person on the sabbath ("The sabbath was made for man, not man for the sabbath; ..." Mk 2/27). He upbraided those who made of temple worship a commercial proposition ("My house shall be called a house of prayer, but you make it a den of robbers." Matt 21/13). He did not allow customary protocol to come in the way of his showing compassion to sinners even when they were women ("Neither do I condemn you; go, and do not sin again." Jn 8/11). Finally, Jesus relativized cultic religious observance by affirming the greater necessity of being reconciled with one's fellow companion ("...

leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." Matt 5/24).

The Prophetism which Jesus showed in his own life can also be discerned in the life of the Church. In the 11th century the Chruch insisted on herself appointing bishops to their diocese. The then pope Gregory VII (1073-85) incurred the displeasure of the secular rulers yet this action of his prevented office in the Church from becoming politicized. In our own times, the Church has continued to assert the right of the Palestinians to a homeland of their own and has rejected compromise with Israel on this issue. Besides, the Church has continually championed the rights of the unborn and consistently opposed euthanasia. "

In today's world, the liberation theologians embody the Prophetism that Jesus practised in his own life. They point out that in a class-ridden (not to mention caste-ridden) society, to accept victim-hood on the part of the oppressed merely because of the threat of violence breaking out is a possible choice, but it need not be the only one a Christian is asked to make. Confrontation, even as Jesus confronted his captors or Gandhiji the British Raj, can well be the right choice in the light of the Christian faith. The liberation theologians would find it strange that people who are systematically oppressed and forced to live in subhuman conditions are not encouraged to gain their rights or confront their oppressors for fear of violence. The fear of violence must not make cowards of the committed. While it is true that there is no Christian imperative advocating the annihilation of the oppressor, it is equally false to assume that nothing should be done till the oppressor has himself suffered a change of heart. If the oppressor fails to practise justice, there must be a resolute effort by the oppressed to gain his/her rights. This may produce

confrontation, conflict and even violence. What is true is that violence is not to be a routine method of seeking redress. It is pertinent to note, however, that a situation is often already violent and the effort on the part of the oppressed is more in the nature of self-defence. While aware of the dangers inherent in having recourse to violence, the Church has not condemned armed defence of oneself or one's neighbour.

CONCLUSION

Religion will foster the liberation of men and women only when the transcendent is mediated through the world of persons without being simply identified with that world. Like other human efforts, liberation as a movement can become domesticated and serve the interest of a few, unless it is critiqued and questioned repeatedly. The two dynamics of Incarnation and Prophetism which are present in Christianity should remind and the challenge that must be addressed to the effort of liberation.

Because of the ambiguities present in its history and because of the ever-present danger of one or the other element being idolized, Christianity needs to be purified from within and from without, to be questioned and challenged as to its essential tenets, and also to be persuaded about the necessity of change so as to remain the liberating force it was meant to be by its founder. In the course of time, many usages and customs are invested with divine sanctions. It is the community as a whole that, through its members and structures, prevents time-bound and humanly fashioned religious observances from making religion obscurantist. Thus can Christianity preserve its message of freedom, bring about the emancipation of men and women who are oppressed and effect authentic liberation.

NOTES

1. Feuerbach Ludwig, *The Essence of Christianity*, Harper Torchbook, 1957, p. 270.
2. Von Rad, Gerhard, *The Message of the Prophets*, SSCM Press, 1968, p. 10.
3. Arokiasamy, S.J and Gispert-Sauch, S.J., "A Theology of Liberation in Asian Chruches?" in *Liberation in Asia*, by Aloysius Pieris, Gujarat Shitya Prakash, 1987, p. 34.
4. The first of the papal documents on workers' right is Rerum Novarum (1891) of Leo XIII.
5. Gutierrez Gustavo, *A Theology of Liberation*, translated and edited by Sr Carided Inda and John Eagleson, Orbis books, 1973.
6. Vatican City 1984, pp. 4-5.
7. Pub. St. Peter's Seminary, Bangalore, 1986, 9.1.
8. Bright John, *A History of Israel*, (SCM Press, 1960), p. 128.
9. *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. I, Abingdom Press, 1952, p. 275.
10. Rahner Karl (edit.), *Theological Dictionary and Vorgrimlex Herbet*, Herder & Herder, 1968 '*Gnosis*', pp. 184-5.
11. Soares-Prabhu George, "The Love Commandment" in *Jesus Today*, edited by S.Kappen, AICUF Publications, 1985.
12. *Instruction on Christian Freedom and Liberation*, p. 73.
13. Ibid., p. 75.
14. Rahner Karl, *Encyclopedia of Theology, The Concise Sacramentum Mundi* (ed.), "Prophetism", Seabury 1975, 1286.
15. *Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Prentice-Hall Inc., New Jersey 1968, 12:20.

6

DOMINATION – LIBERATION : A NEW APPROACH

Enrique Dussel

This article is divided into two parts: The first part consists of a detailed analysis of some of the themes currently prevailing in latin American theology. This is followed, in Part II, by a methodological analysis to show the relevance of this theology not only for our Latin America, but for all "peripheral" cultures—in fact for theology throughout the world, beyond the bounds, that is, of strictly European theology.

DOMINATION—LIBERATION

In this first section we shall examine in detail the trends taken by Latin American theology, which always starts, not from a theological position, but from the state of affairs as they actually exist. We start, therefore, not with what theologians have said about the situation, but with the situation itself. As we can indicate only some of the themes possible, we shall consider the three which tradition suggests should be the most important. In Semitic thought Hammurabi declared quite clearly in his *Code*: "I have defended them with wisdom, so that the strong shall not oppress the weak, and that justice be done to the orphan and widow." The political, sexual and educational levels are also indicated in Isa. I. 17: "Correct oppression; defend the fatherless; plead for the widow." The same three levels are also indicated by Jesus: "Truly I say to

you, there is no man who has left house, or wife or parents or children..." (Lk. 18.29). In the sixteenth century, Bartolome de las Casas accused European Christians of injustice because "the men—for in battles normally only children and women are left alive—are oppressed with the hardest, most horrible and harshest servitude."[1] The brother-to-brother aspect (male, oppressed, weak) is the political level; the man-woman aspect (home, wife, widow) is the sexual level; the father-son aspect (orphan, child) is the educational level. Let us see how, on these three levels, an argument can be constructed from the situation as it actually exists.

THE POLITICAL STARTING-POINT

The present world situation reveals in its structure an imbalance that is already five centuries old. Byzantine Christianity was destroyed in 1453 and, thanks to the experiences of Portugal in north Africa and the failure of its eastward expansion (the conquest movement of the crusades in the Middle Ages which tried to reach the Orient by way of the Arab world), Latin Christianity began to expand in the North Atlantic, which has remained, up to the present day, the centre of world history, politically speaking. First Spain, then Holland and England, followed by France and other European countries, worked out the framework of a truly world-wide oikumene, for until the fifteenth century the Latin, Byzantine Arab, Indian, Chinese, Aztec or Inca oikumenes were purely regional. The new oikumene had its centre in Europe and, since the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the present century, in the United States, Russia, and more recently in Japan. It also had a huge periphery—Latin America, the Arab world, Black Africa, South East Asia, India and China.

European man first said, through Spain and Portugal, with Pizarro and Cortes: "I conquer"—and he said it to the

Indian. With Hobbes he stated more clearly still: "Homo homini lupus." With Nietzsche he called himself "the will to power". Thus the political and economic structure of the world was unified into one all-powerful international market. Her is an example to illustrate the profound moral injustice of this dehumanizing structure.

Table 1

Exports Of Precious Metals From The Private Sector To Europe, With Corresponding Imports Of Merchandise Into Latin America (In Maravedis, The Currency Of The Period)

Period	Exports From The Private Sector	Imported Goods	Balance In Spain's Favour
1561-1570	8,785 Million	1,565 Million	7,220 Million
1581-1590	16,926 Million	3,915 Million	13,011 Million
1621-1630	19,104 Million	5,300 Million	13,804 Million

Source : Works of Alvaro Jara, Pierre Chaunu, Osvaldo Sunkel.

This dependence and colonial injustice was to last without interruption from the sixteenth to the twentieth century. Raul Prebisch tells us in 1964 that, between 1950 and 1961 in Latin America, "net remissions of foreign capital of all types reached the figure of 9,600 million dollars, while Latin American exports overseas amounted to 13,400 million dollars."[2] So far as the political situation is concerned (brother-to-brother) domination is now exercised by the centre over the periphery. This pattern is repeated when the capital city exploits the interior or the provinces,[3] or where an upper-class minority dominates the working classes, and where bureauc-

racy directs the fortunes of the masses.

THE SEXUAL STARTING-POINT

Interpersonal relations show that in the relationship of man to woman, injustice has existed for thousands of years—an injustice which reached its highest level in modern Europe. If it is true, as Freud so brilliantly revealed, that, in our male-dominated society, "the *libido* is generally masculine in nature"[4], it was not so clearly seen that the colonizer was usually male and his victim in our case was the Indian woman. Bishop Jaun Rmirez of Guatemala, wrote on March 10th, 1603: "The worst forms of force and violence, unheard of in other nations and kingdoms, are perpetrated upon the Indian women. The wives of Indian men are raped forcibly by order of the authorities and they are obliged to work in the homes of planters, on farms and in labour camps where they live in sin with the master of the house, with mestizos, mulattos, blacks, or with other cruel men."[5] The colonial male who lies illegally with the Indian woman is the father of the mestizo, and the Indian woman is the mother. The male conquistador—first the planters and colonial bureaucracy, later the native-born creole minority and finally the bourgeoisie of the dependent territories—sexually oppressed and alienated the Indian, the mestizo or the poor woman. The male from the national higher-class minority seized the local girl from the hands of the poor working man living on the outskirts of the big cities—a theme sung in the tango "Margot" 1918, by Celedonio Flores—while demanding of his own high-born wife both purity and chastity. This particular piece of hypocrisy was pointed out by W. Reich and it can be observed extensively in the Third World.

The everyday "I conquer", the ontological *ego cogito*, comes from the oppressor male, who as we see by psycho-

analysis of Descartes, denies his mother, his lover and his daughter. To borrow an expression from Maryse Choisy and Lacan, we might say that these days "phallocracy goes hand-in-hand with plutocracy".

THE EDUCATIONAL STARTING-POINT

Political and sexual domination is completed through education: the child is conditioned within the family, and youth in society is moulded through the media. Since Aristotle[6] educators have maintained that "parents love their children because they regard them as they regard themselves (*heatous*), for they are in some sense one's self (*tauto*), yet divided into separate individuals" (*Et. Nic.* VIII, 12, 1161 b 27-34). Cultural conquest of other peoples is equally an expansion of the self. The conquistador or the propagandist achieves his aim by force of arms or by violently imposing on the other (the Indian, African, Asian, the community, the worker, the oppressed) so-called civilization, or his religion, or by exalting his own cultural system (the ideological closed system). Educational domination is dialectical (from the Greek *dia*=through)—a movement whereby the cultural boundaries of the father, the imperialist or the obligarchy extend so as to embrace the other (the son) within its self. The process of conquest and cultural assimilation in America, Africa and Asia and the education of the son into the self (as Socrates proposed in his mayeutica as a means of "being delivered of one's ideas") is a kind of inverted Passover, an ideological dialectic whereby the new being (the other, the young person) is eclipsed and domination made complete. Further, it is projected into the personal and social ego, so that the son or the oppressed culture even begins to sing the praises of his oppressor: "two different civilizations can be seen side by side—the one belonging to the country itself and the other to Euro-

pean civilization."[7] Sarmiento apurns the culture of the periphery, the dependent nation, the gaucho and the poor; instead he exalts the culture of the "centre", which is a minority culture, elitist and oppressive.

THE CLOSED SYSTEM AND THE OUTSIDE

Starting-point of our argument was the "actual situation" or (reality) considered at three levels. But reality can have two different basic meanings. Anything within the world is real as having existence in the world[8] and in this sense the Indian was a real being assigned to a master and the Black was a real being, who was enslaved. On the other hand, something can also be real from a universal point of view[9] as constituted by its essential physical structure.[10] The political, sexual and educational points we have made are events taking place within various situations, with men playing different roles, whether as dependent underdeveloped countries, as woman or as child. These situations are, however, distortions or denials of that very basis human (one might even say, sacred) quality—face-to-face encounter. The real situation of men *within* circumstances of oppression is a denial of the real nature of man as "another being", – which is the metaphysical meaning of reality.

Encounter face-to-face (Hebrew *pnim'el pnim* of Ex. 33. II), person-to-person encounter (Greek *Prosopon pros prosopon*, I Cor. 13. 12), is a linguistic reduplication, common in Hebrew, used to convey the greatest nearness of comparison—the very closest in this case: closeness, the immediacy of contact between two mysteries each equally aware of meeting another. In sexual activity this encounter is mouth-to-mouth—i.e. the kiss: "Oh that you would kiss me with the kisses of your mouth!" (Song of Song I. I). This is a fundamental truth, a *veritas prima*—to see the face of the other, and

yet to remain oneself; to encounter the mystery which opens out, incomprehensible and sacred beyond the eyes that I actually see and which actually see me in the closeness of encounter.

There was a day when the conquistador stood face-to-face with the Indian, the African and the Asian. The boss stood face-to-face with the unemployed who came to seek work. The man was face-to-face with the helpless woman begging for mercy. The father stood before his new-born son, face-to-face, as a man talking to his intimate friend. With its closed system (the ontological), Europe opened itself as the male and the father was open to the otherness (the metaphysical if *physics* is "being" in the sense of the world's horizons) of the peripheral cultures, to the woman and child, or, we might say, to the "stranger, the widow and the orphan", as the prophets had it.

The other is primary (the parent who beget the son, the society which admits us into its traditions or the Creator who gives us real being). Man, rather than relate to nature (the economic level), chooses to expose himself to another man. We are born in the womb of someone (our mother); in our first waking moments we eat that someone (we suckle at the breasts of our mother). We ardently want to remain face-to-face ever afterwards. After the closeness of face-to-face relationship the separation necessitated by economic dealings is a painful alternative.

THE OPPRESSOR PRAXIS—SIN AND THE POOR

Biblical symbolism shows us through the prophetic tradition an argument or line of thought which we shall here set out briefly. In the first place "Cain rose up against his brother Abel, and killed him" (Gen. 4. 8) and Jesus adds the comment "innocent Abel" (Mt. 23 25). To say "no" to my neighbour is

the only possible sin, it is the "sin of the world" or the fundamental sin. The same "no" to my neighbour is said by the priest and the levite in the parable of the Samaritan (Lk. 10. 31-2). Augustine, in his political interpretation of original sin, says clearly that "Cain founded a city, while Abel the wanderer did not".[11] Historically and actually sin since the fifteenth century has taken the form of a "no" on the part of the North Atlantic centre to the Indian, the African, the Asian and to the worker, the peasant and the outcast. It has been a "no" to the woman in patriarchal families, and a "no" to the chid in the oppressor's educational system.

"No" to my neighbour (anthropologically speaking) or fratricide leads to maximizing the reign of the "flesh" (basar in Hebrew; sarx in Greek). The device of *temptation* (and not of Prometheus bound to the *ananke*) is the one proposed by the closed system in the words, "You shall be as gods" (Gen. 3. 5). Sin, beginning as "no" to my neighbour, takes the form of self-deification, the exalting of self as an object of worship, and leads to idolatory—"no" to the Creator. To be able to say with Nietzsche "God is dead", it was necessary first of all to kill his manifestation of himself to the Indian, the African and the Asian.

Idolatrous exaltation of the *flesh*, in this case as seen in the modern structure of European Christianity, produces within the closed system a separation between the one who dominates "the world" (a new term for "*flesh*", but now completely deified) and the oppressed. On the one side stand "the rulers" (*archontcs*) of the nations (who) lord it over them (*katakyrieousin*) and the great men (who) exercise authority" (Mt. 20. 25). These are the "angels" (sent by) the "Prince of this world" and the Pilates who "ask for water and wash their hands" (Mt. 27. 24). The present world order (economic, cultural, sexual and aesthetic) is the prevailing rule of sin, inasmuch as it oppresses the poor. The "rulers" have their group

projection which they objectivize as the projection of the whole system and which expands as an imperialist projection by means of conquest in Latin America, Africa and Asia. The "self" remains the "self". The "praxis of domination" of those who usurp the position of God and exalt themselves is sin in a very real and strict sense. This is the praxis of "no" to my neighbour, spoken to the oppressed brother, to woman as a sexual object, to the child as the unthinking reproducer of traditional ways of life.

The oppressed one is Job. He suffers because sin (the praxis of the great one acting as *oppressor*) alienates him, but he is not aware of having committed any sin at all. The wise men in his situation, speaking for the system (Bildad and Sophar), try to convince the oppressed one in the name of Satan, that he is a sinner. By so doing they maintain the innocence of the real sinner—of the oppressor.

The oppressed one humanly speaking is not the poor (the oppressed as another). The "poor" in the words "Blessed are the poor" (*ptochoi*) (Lk. 6.20), or better still in the words "The poor you shall have with you always" (Mt. 26. 11) is the other in that he does not share the supreme value of the socio-political system. The "poor" are just as much a category—they are the oppressed nation, class, person or woman in that these are outside the structure of the oppressor. In this sense the "poor" (in the biblical sense) are not the same as the alienated oppressed living *within* the system, but they do share many of the characteristics of the poor socially and economically speaking.

THE PRAXIS OF LIBERATION

To make the contrast with the "praxis of sin" set out in the previous section, we can now look at the praxis of liberation, of anti-sin or the direct opposite of the negation of the other.[12]

The Bible speaks, in the story of Moses (Ex. 3 ff.), or in the parable of the Samaritan, of a direct "yes" to my neighbour when he is still oppressed within the system. The prophetic light of faith permits us to see through the outward surface of the oppressed and to see the other within. Behind the slave of Egypt lies man, liberated. Behind the beaten, robbed traveller lying at the roadside is the *persona* of the human. This is not a turning aside (*aversio*) from the other, but a turning towards (*conversio*) the other as a fellow citizen of the City of God. As we see in the case of Bartolome de las Casas, that ardent anti-conquistador and modern European, the righteous man discovers the other as he really is: "God made these people (the Indians) the simplest of men, without guile or cunning, not quarrelsome, riotous or rowdy. They bear no ill-will or hatred, and they seek no revenge."[13]

To say "yes" to my neighbour, the system first has to be broken into, opened up. We have, in other words, to cease to believe in the system. The Virgin of Nazareth, the flesh, opens us to the spirit (otherness). Jesus said that we should "render to Caesar that which is Caesar's, and to God that which is God's (Mt. 22.21). Like the prophets before him, he thus did not believe in Caesar, the flesh and the closed system. When Feuerbach and Marx said they did not believe in the "god" of Hegel and of the European bourgeoise (the only god they knew), they set out along the correct and orthodox path.[14]

To achieve the breakdown of the closed system of sin, otherness has to attack it subversively. The ana-lectic (what is outside the system), the absolute Other, the Word (in Hebrew *dabhar*, which has nothing to do with the Greek *logos*) breaks into the closed system and becomes flesh: "... in the form of God... he emptied himself (ekenosen) and took the form of a servant" (*loulou*) (Phil. 2.6-7). Christ, the church, the prophet must assume within the system the position of the oppressed. The servant (*'ebhedh* in Hebrew, *doulos* or *pais* in Greek)

really assumes the position of the oppressed, whether socially, politically, culturally or economically. In their alienated position they become like the Indian, African or Asian, the worn-out woman, the educationally manipulated child. They immerse themselves in the prison of sin (the system), but do not obey its rules.

The servant, the prophet or the poor in spirit[15] acting from amongst the ranks of and together with the oppressed, carry out the praxis of liberation (Hebrew 'abodhah; Greek—diakonia which is a work of righteousness and worship performed by the saving God. This service performed by the Samaritan or by Moses for the sake of the poor or the slaves as members of the outside, is a subversive praxis, both historical (and hence socio-political, cultural, economic and sextual) and eschatological. To this end he is called (Lk. 4.18; Is. 61.1) to undermine the system and direct history along a new path[16] and to liberate the poor in a year of festival or rejoicing.[17]

The liberator or the servant prophet, by responding to the cry of the poor (as other), discloses himself as the herald of the new system over against the old system of sin, imperialism and oppression, whether international or national, economic, political, cultural or sexual. Hence he announces the dispossession of the ruler and the end of him as an oppressor. The closed system or the flesh transforms mere domination into repression, violence and persecution. So the liberating servant is the first to die: "Jerusalem, Jerusalem! killing the prophets and stoning those who are sent to you!" (Mt. 23.37). In such a case the liberator becomes a redeemer—the one who, by a truly expiatory sacrifice (Hebrew—*Kibburim*), pays in his own flesh for the liberation of the other: "Whoever would be great among you must be your servant (*diakonos*), and he who would be first among you must be your slave (*doulos*); even as the Son of man came not to be served but to

serve (*diakonesai*) and to give his life as a ransom for many" Luton *anti pollon*—(Mt. 20.26-28).

There are many examples of this praxis of liberation—the prophets and Jesus, the Christians persecuted under the Roman Empire, Bishop Valdivieso (murdered in 1550 by the governor for defending the Indians in Nicaragua), Pereira Neto in Brazil in 1969 or Mahatma Gandhi or Patrice Lumumba in the non-Christian third World—we see how the liberator, when he announces the end of the old system, is assassinated violently and in cold blood by the angels of the Prince of this World, that is, by the conquistadors, the imperialist armies, the capitalist bankers or the "herodian" governments of the dependent nations themselves. The closed system spells death for itself. The death of the liberator is, on the other hand, the death of death and the beginning of a new birth (Jn. 3.5-8).[18]

ECCLESIOLOGY OF REDEMPTIVE LIBERATION

All the foregoing is constantly lived out in the actual historical context of the community of the "called", that is the Church or even world history itself.

Since the liberating and redemptive death of Christ, world history has been living under a new order of reality, since any man of good-will receives enough grace for salvation. However, because of sin, historical institutions (social, political, economic, sexual and educational) tend to close in on themselves, petrify and become self-perpetuating. They have to be given new impetus, be opened to new influence and be given dialectical flexibility in the direction of the parousia. God, from the creative outside, has founded the Church at the very heart of the flesh, of the world, of the closed system (an alienating or kenotic movement). The Church, his gift, is the becoming flesh of the spirit. By baptism, the Christian is consecrated to the lib-

erating service of the world, and received into the community. The earthly phenomenon of the Church, an institutional community, was born, geo-politically speaking, in the western Mediterranean and reached maturity in Latin and Germanic Christianity, in other words in Europe, which together with the United States and Russia is the geo-political centre of our modern world. On the other hand, since it was born, socially speaking, among the oppressed people of the Roman Empire, it today finds itself part of those nations that oppress the dependent peripheral nations and frequently finds itself compromised with the ruling classes (at national level) or with the ruling culture.

Thus, the Church which has become flesh in the world (like the leaven in the dough in the parable) comes to be identified with the flesh and the closed system. This self-identification with the Prince of this World is the sin of the Church, which petrifies the system and even sanctifies it. The terms *Holy* Roman Empire, *Christian* countries, Western *Christian* civilization, and so on, bear witness to this.

But the essential nature of the Church as the liberating community and institution requires it to identify itself with the oppressed so as to "break down the barriers" of the systems which have become closed by the work of sin, or by injustice, whether political—at national or international level—economic, social, cultural or sexual. The sign (*semeion* of St John's Gospel) of the Church, its proclamation, can only be effected by involving the community in the movement of liberation (Hebrew—*pasah* means moving, march of flight), to move a system which acts oppressively towards becoming a new system which acts to liberate. And this, in its turn, is, so far as the Church is concerned, the sign of the eschatological forward movement of the Kingdom. The Eucharist is a foretaste, in the forward movement of the Kingdom; it is a feast of liberation from sin (from slavery in Egypt). The liberation of

Latin America (a dependent and to some extent oppressed sector of the World Church). At the same time, liberation of oppressed classes—women, children and the poor—is also the basis of evangelization.

APPLICATION OF THE THEOLOGICAL ARGUMENT

We must now turn our attention to the theological argument itself, first of all as we see it in Europe. (We shall therefore be looking at what might be called the white theology of North America). This may lead us to define the theology that emerges as a theology of oppression—whether applicable on a world-wide scale (coming from the peripheral nations), a national scale (coming from the oppressed classes), to sex (a theology of woman) or to education (from the point of view of the younger generation).

CONDITIONING OF THEOLOGICAL THINKING

It is widely accepted by critical thinker in Latin America today that all political expansion soon comes to be based on an ontology of domination (an *ad hoc* philosophy of theology). Modern European expansion had as its ontological foundation the *ego cogito*[19] preceded by the actual fact of "I conquer". For Spinoza, in his *Ethics*, the *ego* is a fragment of the unique substance of Go—a position which the young Schelling and Hegel were to adopt later—the European *ego* had been deified. Fichte shows us that in the "I am that I am", the "I" is absolutely fixed.[20] It is an "I" that is natural, infinite and absolute (and in Hegel definitely divine). In Nietzsche, the "I" becomes a creative power ("I" as the "will to power"), while in Husserl it becomes the most abstract *ego cogito cogitatum* of phenomenology.[21] The most serious effect is that *the other* or the neighbour (the Indian, the African, the Asian or the woman) is reduced to the level of an idea. The meaning of the

other is formulated in terms of the "I" who dreamed it into existence. The other is made a separate entity, becomes a thing, is abstracted into a *cogitatum*.

Similarly, European theology or the theology of the centre cannot escape from this reduction. The expansion of Latin-German Christianity gave rise to its own theology of conquest. Semitic and Christian thought of the Old and New Testaments was reduced to a process of Indo-European Hellenization from the second century onwards. Medieval European theology was able to justify the feudal world and the *ius dominativum* of the lord over the serf. Tridentine and Protestant theology had nothing to say about the Indian, the African or the Asian (except the Salamanca School and that only for a few decades). Finally the expansion of capitalism and neo-capitalism allowed Christians of the centre to formulate a theology of the *status quo* and the ecumenism of peaceful co-existence between Russia, the United States and Europe so as to dominate the "periphery" more effectively. The other—the poor-was once again defined in terms of the European "I": *Ego cogito theologatum*. With the basis of theological thinking so reduced, a parallel reduction occurs in the whole field of theology. Sin is reduced so as to apply only to *intra* national injustice; it is exclusivized, allowed to have no political application, shown to have nothing to do with sex (or at other levels shown to have an excessive relation to sex). But more seriously the limits and meaning of salvation and redemption are equally reduced to the narrow bounds of the Christian experience of the centre. We have an individual salvation, interiorized and otherworldly, resorting frequently to some painful masochistic experience at a given time and place, whereas the true cross of real history demands our life at the least expected moment.

This theology suffers from many unconscious limitations. Firstly, the limitations of the religiosity of German-Latin-Mediterranean Christianity which was accepted with-

out hesitation as real simply because it was Latin. Then there are liturgical limitations, in which the Latin-type liturgy is regarded as the only one acceptable for the Christian religion and which still prevents other cultures having their own liturgies. There are also cultural limitations, in that theology is the province of an intellectual elite, university professors in well-paid and secure posts, a situation far removed from, and unhelpful to the study of Tertullian and St. Augustine. There are political limitations, for it is a theology adjusted and compromised by its closeness to the metropolitan power of the world. There are also economic limitations, for this theology finds favour for the most part among upper-class minorities in the bourgeoisie and in the neo-capitalist world (although sometimes there may be poor monks, they belong to "rich" orders). Finally, there are sexual limitations, because those who think theologically are celibates and have been unable to formulate an authentic theology of sexuality, marriage and the family. For all these reasons, modern European theology from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries is unconsciously compromised by its connection with the praxis of oppression in the political, educational and sexual fields.

It would be no exaggeration to say that in many respects it is really a theological ideology in that many facets of it remain unseen by virtue of its origins, just as we are unable to see the further side of the moon simply because we are inhabitants of planet earth. And what is still worse, in Latin America there are many progressive theologians who simply repeat the theology of the centre and by so doing they obscure their own message and, to their shame, become just as much advocates of oppression.

REVELATION AND FAITH

Western theology has for centuries taken certain presupposi-

tions for granted as unquestionably correct. Kant's ontology (which postulates a rational faith), Hegel's (which sees faith as within the bounds of reason) or Heidegger's (the comprehensiveness of Being) admit the Wholeness of being as the only frontier of thought. Being-in-the-world is the fundamental fact, original and primary.[22] Existential theology starts from the basis of the world as the Whole. The fault lies in that, in fact, the Whole is always mine, ours, the European's or the centre's. What passes unnoticed is that I am thereby denying other Christian worlds and other equally valid experiences. I am denying anthropological otherness as a possible starting-point for theological thought.[23]

As the older Schelling so clearly saw in his *Philosophie der Offenbarung* faith in the World of the Other lies beyond ontological reason (the Hegelian *Sein*), an argument that Kierkegaard carried forward (e.g. in the *Postscriptum*). Faith stands upon the revelation of the Other. Revelation is only the outgoing message of God, existentially speaking, which sets out the guidelines for interpreting the reality of Christ. In everyday life (existentially),[24] God manifests the hidden secret (the fact of redemption in Christ) by means of an interpreting light (a classicist would put it: *ratio sub qua*), or by supplying guidelines(categories) for all mankind and for all history. God gives only a specific revelation, but more importantly, the categories[25] which permit us to interpret it. Revelation comes to a peak in Christ with the New Covenant, but it unfolds its potentialities throughout the course of history. What we are trying to stress here is that this revelation is not effected in history by human words alone, but through man himself (as exterior to the flesh or the system), the poor and the Christman.

Faith, which accepts the World of the Other, becomes Christian faith when the divine Word in Christ is accepted through the mediation of the poor man in history, who actu-

ally lives in a concrete situation. The true showing forth of the Word of God is the word of the poor man who cries "I hunger". Only the man who hears the word of the poor (beyond the system, and therefore analectic, which pre-supposes that he does not believe in the system) can hear it as the Word of God. God is not dead. What has been assassinated is his self-manifestation—the Indian, the African and the Asian—and because of this God cannot reveal himself any more. Abel died in the self-deification of Europe and the centre, and therefore God has hidden his face. The revealed category is clear enough: "I was hungry and you gave me no food... They also shall ask, Lord, when did we see you hungry?" (Mt. 25.42.4).[26] Following the death of the "divine" Europe, there can rise the faith in the poor of the periphery, faith in God as mediated by the poor. The new manifestation of God in history (not a resurrection, for he never died) will be brought about by righteousness and not by endless theological treatises on the death of God.[27]

THE PRAXIS OF LIBERATION AND THEOLOGY

Given the data or revelation and by virtue of living faith, theology is a reflection of reality. Recently there has been much talk of theologies of earthly realities or doubt, leading eventually to a theology of revolution[28] or development.[29] In European circles, to take just the terms political theology[30] the matter has sterner implications. But Latin America detects in the theologico-political argument an attempt to restrict the prophetic voice of protest to the narrow national sphere. From this narrow viewpoint the fact of international, imperialist injustice passes unnoticed. But eschatological, undiscriminating protest must reach out not only to the constituent parts of the system, but to the system as a whole.[31]

In the same way the provocative theology of hope[32] be-

trays the limitations of the critical theory of the Frankfurt School (which influences Metz) and the works of Ernst Bloch (who inspires Moltmann). Both these philosophical hypotheses have failed to overcome ontology and dialectic, and they consider the future as a development of the Self. Although Moltmann understands the future as otherness, he still has difficulty in finding beyond the projection of the system (but this side of the *eschaton*) an historical projection of political, economic, cultural and sexual liberation. Hope extends as far as an historical change in the pattern of life,[33] but not to a radical renewal of the present system with a view to an historical liberation movement as a true sign of eschatological advance. Without this concrete mediation their hopes reaffirm the *status quo* and constitute a false dream.

On the other hand, a European theology of liberation will bring out clearly the question of Christianity and the class struggle,[34] but within the limits of a national Marxism and before moving on to the theory of dependence. It has not yet seen that the struggle of the proletariat within the centre itself, that is, in the metropolitan powers, can be oppressive in terms of the colonial proletariat of the periphery. Classes have been thinking double and may often oppose their own interests at international level. National liberation of the dominated countries goes hand in hand with the social liberation of oppressed classes. Hence the category known as the people takes on a special significance as opposed to the category of class.[35]

Latin American theology derives, by contrast, from the thinking of many politically involved Christians about the praxis for liberating the oppressed. This theology-ethic is a product of the periphery, coming from the outsiders, from the lumpen of this world. Their inspiration is not only sheer necessity (the existence within the system of matters needing attention), but also the desire to liberate (Hebrew '*ab-*

hodhah; Greek—*diakonia*), that is a ministry of liberation beyond the limits of ontology. And the sphere of liberation is not only political, but also sexual and educational. In fact, this is a theology of the poor, woman as a sexual object and the child.

TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF LIBERATION

After the great theology of Christianity from the fourth to the fifteenth centuries and modern European theology from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries, the theology of liberation of the periphery and of the oppressed is in fact the whole of traditional theology set into redemptive motion from the point of view of the poor. The theology of Christianity (th old model) almost identified the Christian faith with Mediterranean, Latin or Byzantine culture, subsequently halting progress. The argument over Latin in Vatican II itself is an obvious recent demonstration of this. Modern European theology, individualized and imperialistic, is reproduced in the colonies as progressive theology by those who operate as an oppressive colonial minority and take as the scheme of salvation a theology which for the periphery is meaningless and therefore uncritical. The *status quo* is once again supported. By contrast, the theology of liberation (where a theology of revolution is only a first stage, political theology is just one of the possible applications and the theology of hope looks to the future) is based on the praxis of liberation, or on the movement or way through the desert of human history, moving from sin as the dominating influence exerted by the various systems (political, sexual and educational) to irreversible salvation in Christ and his Kingdom (the *eschaton*). This movement is accomplished by every man, all people and every age—in short, by the whole of human history. However, there are certain critical periods (*kairos*) in history and Latin America is living through one such period

ica is living through one such period now,[36] when complete eschatogical liberation can be more clearly indicated by the prophets, Christians or the Church. Thus the theology of liberation gradually becomes an African or black theology, though to-date there has been no response from Asia,[37] and finally a theology of the whole world and of all the oppressed.

The theology of liberation which is coming from Latin American thinkers[38] can be distinguished when its dependence as a theology is realized in the same way as economy or culture is realized to be dependent (the culture of oppression as Salazar Bondy said in Peru in 1968). Gradually this theology discovers its own methods which I have defined as analectic and not only dialectic,[39] in that it is listening to the trans-ontological voice of the other (*ana-*) and is interpreting its message by means of analogies. (The other, however, remains mysteriously distinct from us, until such time as the progress of the movement towards liberation allows us to enter upon its world). It adds an entirely new dimension to the question of analogies.

For its own part of the theology of liberation favours the interpretation of the voice of the oppressed as the basis for its praxis. This is not a private departure within the unified Whole of universal abstract theology, neither is it an equivocal, self-explanatory theology.

Starting from a unique position of difference, each theologian, and indeed the whole of Latin American theology, takes a fresh look at traditional themes passed down through history, but enters the interpretative process from the distinct emptiness of his new found liberty (that is, with a blank sheet). The theology of a true theologian or a people like the Latin Americans is analogically similar, yet at the same time distinct, and hence unique, original and completely individual. If what is similar becomes univocal, the history of theol-

ogy will remain European. On the other hand, if difference is made absolute, theologies become equivocal. The aim is not Hegelian identity, nor yet Jasperian equivocation, but analogy. The theology of liberation is a new focus in the history of theology, an analogical focus which has come to the fore after modern developments in Europe, Russia and the united States, and predating to some extent the most recent African and Asian theology. The theology of the poor nations, the theology of world-wide liberation is not easily acceptable to Europeans, who believe too passionately in their own invariable world-wide acceptance. They will not listen to the voice of the other (the barbarians, non-being if we define. Being as the European way of thought), the voice of Latin America, the Arab World or South-East Asia and China. The voice of Latin America is no longer a mere echo of European theology. It is a barbarians' theology—as the apologies would say, making the contrast with the "wise according this world." But we know that we have taken up our stand on the further side of the modern, oppressive, European closed system. Our minds are set upon the liberation of the poor. We point towards the world—man of the future—man who shall be eternally free.

NOTES

1. *Brevisima relacion de la destrucc on de las Indias* (Buenos Aires, 1966), p. 36. For an historical insight into the argument of this present article, see my *Historia de la Iglesia en America Latina. Coloniaje y liberacion (1492-1972) (Barcelona, 1972)*; for the theological matter see *Caminos de liberacion latino-americana*, two volumes (Buenos Aires, 1972-73); for the philosophical background, *Para una etica de la liberacion latino-americana*, three volumes (Buenos Aires, 1973-74).
2. *Nueva politica commercial para el desarrollo* (Mexico, 1966), p. 30. If to this is added the deterioration in price-ratios between raw

materials and manufactured products, the so-called underdeveloped countries have been simply exploited, expropriated and robbed. From this bulletin of CEPAL (UNESCO) came the so-called social economy of dependence based on the works of Celso Furtade, Jaguaribe, Cardoso, Faletto, Theotonio does Santos, Gunter Frank or Hinkelammert in Latin America or of Samir Amin in Africa, with the European position given by Arghiri Emmanuel or Charles Bettelheim. See also a bibliography on the subject in *Desarrollo y revolucion, Iglesia y liberacion (Bibliografia)* produced by CEDIAL, Bogota, Parts 1 & 2 (1971-3).

3. In the presidential elections in Argentina on 23 Sept. 1973, the Federal Capital (Buenos Aires) awarded the working/peasant class candidate 42% of the votes, while the poorest provinces in the north-east awarded more than 75% (Jujuy, Salta, Tucuman, Santiago del Estero, Catamarca, La Rioja). The big Latin American capitals provide evidence of internal dependence.
4. *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, III, 4. Freud's error consists in confusing "the reality of masculine domination" in our society with the "reality of sexuality" as such. See my "*Para una erotica latinoamericana*" (chapter VII in *Para una etica de la liberacion, latinoamericana*. III, pp. 42-7).
5. *Archivo General de Indias* (Seville), Audiencia de Guatemala 156.
6. See my *Para una etica de la liberacion*, op. cit., pp. 137 ff.
7. Domingo F. Sarmiento, *Facundo* (English trans.)
8. This is the meaning of reality for Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York, 1962).
9. Expression used by older Schelling (*Einleitung in die Philosophie der Mythologie*, XXIV); Werke, V (Munich, 1959), p. 748; transmundan, though not with the same meaning. Beyond being and beyond the world, is the Lord of being (ibid.).
10. Xavier Zubiri, *Sobre la escencia* (Mandid, 1963), p. 395; "Reality is the object as something in its own right. The object is actualized in the mind and presents itself to us intellectually as existing in tis own right before (prius) we actually see it." In the same sense the other for Levinas is the reality beyond the closed system and beyond being (cf. *Totalite et Infini*, The Hague, 1961). See also my *La Dialectica Hegeliana* (Mendoza, 1972), pp. 141 ff.
11. *Civ. Dei, XV, I, Civ. Dei* expounds the two basic biblical categories:

the "closed-shop" founded on self-seeking love (*libido*), and openness which lies open to the future in loving concern for others (*caritas*). See Para una etica de la libercacion latinoamericana, Chap. IV, SS 20-23, and Chap. V, SS 26-8, volume II, pp. 13-88.

12. See my *Para una etica de la liberacion*, chap. III, S 16, vol. I, pp. 118 ff.; chap. IV, S 23, and chap. V, SS 29-31, vol. II, pp. 42-127); thus this is a negation of what Hegel affirmed coming from an Outside unknown to him.
13. *Brevisima relacion*, p. 33.
14. See my paper "Atheism of the prophets and Marx", delivered to the 2nd Argentine Theologians Week, Guadalupe (Buenos Aires, 1973), and "*Historia de la fe cristiana y cambio social en America Latina*", in *America Latina, dependencia y liberacion* (Buenos Aires, 1973), pp. 193 ff; also "From Secularization to Secularism", in *Concilium*, September 1969 (American edn., Vol. 47).
15. I may be permitted this translation of *hoi ptokhoi* to pneumatic (Mt. 5.3), to distinguish between the "poor" as the outsider (the sense in which I use it in S 5), and the "poor in spirit", i.e. the actively involved liberator, the prophet. See in my *El humanismo semita* (Buenos Aires, 1969), the footnote on "*Universalismo y mission en los poemas del Siervo de Yahveh*" (pp. 127 ff.).
16. "He has put down the mighty from their thrones, and exalted those of low degree; he has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich he has sent empty away" (Lk. 1.52-3). Sub-vertere in Latin is to make low what was high and vice versa.
17. Lev. 25.8-12 "Jubilee" comes from the Hebrew *yobhel*, the horn-shaped trumpet which announced the liberation of the slaves (Ex. 21 2-6).
18. "That which is born of the flesh (the closed system) is flesh. That which is born of the spirit (the other, the outsider) is spirit" (ibid.).
19. "*Je pense, donc je suis*" was a statement so firm and confident that the most determined contradictions of the sceptics were not enough to shake it;" see *Discours de la methode*, IV (Paris, 1953), pp. 147-8).
20. "*Ich bin Ich. Das Ich ist schlechthin gesetzt*" (*Grundlage der gesamten Wissenchafts lehre* (1794), S 1 (Berlin, 1956), I, 96). He still says that "the essence of critical philosophy is the absolute posi-

tion of an 'I', absolute and unconditioned, and not to be defined in terms of any higher order." For the only translation in German: "*Darin besteht nun das Wesen der kritischen Philosophie, dass ein absolutes Ich als schlechthin unbedingt and durch nichts Hoheres bestimmbar aufgestellt werde*). (Ibid. I, S 3; I, 119).

21. See my *La dialectica hegeliana*, 4-9 (pp. 31-121) and *Para ana destruccion de la historia de la etica*, SS 11-21 (Mendoza, 1972), pp. 75-162.
22. The theology of Karl Rahner comes from Heidegger's philosophy (also influenced by Marechal) and is set out in *Spirit in the World* (London and Sydney, 1968), or in *Hearers of the Word* (London and Syder, 1969). Quite rightly Eberhard Simons, *Philosophie der Ofienbarung. Auscinandersetzung mit K. Rahner* (Stuttgart, 1966), demonstrates that the *Mit-Sein* has not been brought out sufficiently in Rahner's thinking. It is not a matter of mentioning the other as a mere aside, but of making it the starting-point of theological argument, but not merely of the divine Other.
23. For a philosophical point of view see the works of Levinas (op. cit.), and Michael Theunissen, *Der Andere* (Berlin, 1965), and chap. III of my *Para and etica de la liberacion*, vol I, pp. 97 ff.
24. As Yves Congar so well shows, the *locus theologicus* is everyday events ("the history of the Church, in a certain sense, embraces all of it"), see his "Church History as a Branch of Theology" in *Concilium*, September 1970 (American edn., vol. 57). Revelation is mediated by historical otherness—God reveals himself in history. In the same sense Edward Schillebeeckx, *Revelation and Theology* (London and Melbourne, 1967), offers us the "Word as the medium of revelation". However, in both cases, as with Schelling and Kierkegaard, the mediatory function of the anthropological outsider is not grasped. It is not enough to say that revelation is possibly effected in the form of human speech, as Rahner goes in his *Hearers of the Word*, but we must go on to say that the poor, like the metaphysical other is the mediator chosen by God for his revelation. As a fact of history (not just of myth as in Exodus 3) Moses heard the word of God through the mediation of the poor (Ex. 2. 11-15), as Schillebeeckx says in his *Revelation and Theology*.
25. These categories are flesh (Totality), the poor (the human outsider), God as creator and redeemer, the Word, the Spirit (out-

reaching modes of the divine in face-to-face encounter") and service (*bhodhah or diakonia*). See my *Caminos de liberacion latinoamericana* II. VI. The category is what is revealed in Christ as essential revelation. What is interpreted by these categories is the Christian meaning of event, the fruit of faith.

26. In *Concilium*, February 1973 (American edn. Vol. 82) : much was said about liturgy, Scripture, poetry, but almost nothing about the privileged place of faith in the other—the poor; without him faith becomes ideology, mere doctrine, obscurity.
27. See *Caminos de liberacion latinoamericana* I, SS, 1-7; *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, SS 31 and 36.
28. From Latin America see Hugo Assmann, *Teologia desde la praxis de la liberation* (Salamanca, 1973), pp. 76 ff. A bibliography on *Desarrollo y revolucion*, CEDIAL, II, pp. 73-95. This idea and the one that follows are inspired in part by the Christian praxis in Latin America.
29. Cf. bibliography in CEDIAL (op. cit.), II, 31-47.
30. The works of johann Baptist Metz is of importance: starting with "*Friede and Gerechtigkeit. Ueberlegungen zu einer politischen Theologie*", in Civitas VI, (1967), pp. 13 ff.; then *Theology of the World* (London, 1969), and "*The Problem of a Political Theology*", in *Concilium* June, 1968 (American edn., Vol. 36); and finally the colourless "*erlosung and Emanzipation*", in *Stimmen der Zeit* 3 (1973), pp. 171 ff. (where the world "*Befreiung*" is avoided in its ambivalent sense of "cross". The "cross" of the murdered prophet is not the same as the "pain" of the oppressed poor.
31. Liberation protest as a function of the Church (see J.B. Metz, *Theology of the World*, op. cit.) is very different if it concerned with international political protest (pointing out the unjust acquisitiveness of the centre), and with social protest (pointing out the oppression of the ruling classes). In this situation we still look for a concrete programme of action to make the protest really mean anything. Theology is essentially an ethic, and most important, a political ethic.
32. Cf. Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London, 1969): idem, *Perspektiven der Theologie* (Mainz, 1968) and *Diskussion uber die 'Theologie Hofjnung'* (Munich, 1967).
33. See J. Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, op. cit. Something in the nature of a reactionary professional ethic, but not a subversive

movement to oppose the closed nature of the system, and which knows it has to initiate a programme of historical liberation as a sign of the coming Kingdom.

34. Cf. Jules Girardi, *Christianisme, liberation humaine et lutte des classes* (Paris, 1972).
35. See my *De la dialectica a la analectica*, general conclusions (to be published in *Salamanca*, 1974).
36. Bear in mind that Latin America is the only continent, culturally speaking, which has been both Christian and colonial. Europe has been Christian, but was not colonized. Other colonial peoples have not been Christianized. This places Latin America in a unique position in world and ecclesiastical history. From our unique experience must come, of necessity, a theology which must be different to be authentic.
37. In Africa, such authors as V. Mulango, A. Vanneste, H. Burkle; the "*black theology*" of J. Cone, A. Hargreaves, Th. Ogletree, Ch. Wesley point to this line of thought; see also J. Peters, "*Black Theology as a Sign of Hope*", *Concilium*, November 197 (American edn., vol. 59); G.D. Fischer, "*Theologie in Lateinamerika als 'Theologie' der Befreiung*" in *Theologie and Glaube* (1971), pp. 161-78; R. Strunk, "*Theologie and Revolution*", in *Theologische Quartalschrift*, I (1973), pp. 44-53; and CEDIAL, op. cit., II, pp. 58-72). Some European opinions, for example, Vancourt, the "*Theologie de la liberation*", *in Esprit et Vie* 28 (1972), pp. 433-440 & 657-62, who thinks that this theology is inspired solely by the Marxist method, are very biased.
38. G. Gutierrez wondered in his short work "*Hacia una teologia de la liberacion*" (Montevideo, 1969) whether beyond a theology of development we ought to formulate a specific theology of liberation. The previous year Rubem Alves in *Religion: opio o instrumento de liberacion?* (Montevideo, 1968) had already gone some way, with this idea. Also Methol Ferre in his article "*Iglesia y sociedad opulenta. Una critica a Suenens desde America Latina*", in *Vispera* 12 (1969), offprint, pp. 1-24, points to a "*struggle of two theologies*", since "all theology one way or another has political implications", and in fact, "within the Catholic Church itself there exists oppression by the richer local churches of the poorer ones". Thus there arose a new theological argument.
39. See my *Para una etica de la liberacion latinoamericana*, S 36; vol.

II, pp. 156 ff. I would define theology as "an analectic pedagogy of historical and eschatological liberation". A Pedagogy, for the theologian, is a teacher and not a politician, not is he involved sexually; analectic because the method is neither purely epistemological nor dialectic. For this definition see my *Caminos de liberacion* II, *lecture* XII.

PART FOUR

ISLAM

7

RELIGION, IDELOGOY AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY : AN ISLAMIC POINT OF VIEW

Asghar Ali Engineer

I

The people of Asia and Africa are struggling today to transform their societies. Struggle for socio-economic transformation is by itself a stupendous task. However, before we get on with the subject it is important to answer three relevant questions. The right perspective to the subject can be obtained only if we answer these questions.

First important question is transformation for whom, second question is transformation for what and thirdly how to bring about this transformation. As far as the first question is concerned I have no hesitation to say that transformation, through modernization and change or otherwise, if it is to be meaningful, must be primarily for the weakest sections of the society. In other words, mere elite-oriented transformation would not only be hardly beneficial to the weaker sections of the society but – and it is important dimension of the problem to be taken into account – it would also lead to development of highly authoritarian structures in the society. The elite-oriented development can be sustained only if protest from below can be stifled and only an authoritarian regimes – whatever its democratic pretensions – can 'successfully' crush such a protest.

Many Asian and African countries started, after their lib-

eration from the clutches of western imperialism, with a democratic model but were soon transformed into authoritarian regimes as their socio-economic development was designed to fulfil the aspirations of upper class elites. In such a model of development all the surplus extracted from the toil of the weaker section is invested in high-tech projects designed to benefit the elites. High tech and westernisation thus become not only the main idiom of development process but also become the touchstone of progress and change.

Here I would like to draw the attention to yet another phenomenon consequential to this model of development. Westernization and elite oriented modernised development is not rooted in the native society and culture and thus sets the process of religio-cultural alienation in motion. It also gives momentum to the process of migration from rural to chaotic urban areas where the rural population lands itself in slums further deepening the process of alienation. The social change which is neither meaningful to them nor beneficial and also becomes incomprehensible creates a sense of frustration and fatalism and develop deep conservative tendencies and are ready for fundamentalists to exploit them for their own political ends. Like the Khomeini of Iran they might even use radical religious rhetoric to entice them.

The Shah of Iran, it must be noted, followed the policy of westernization and modernisation immensely benefiting the social elite of Iran in turn breeding corruption – both moral as well as material. This process of modernisation not only left the rural and urban poor high and dry but created among them a strong sense of resentment towards his regime. The rural poor, victims of the Shah's 'land reforms' policy which only facilitated deeper penetration of American agro-business corporations, were compelled to migrate to the urban areas and swell the ranks of urban poor. In urban areas they experienced nothing but poverty, unemployment, giddying heights

of inflation and rank corruption. Thus their alienation was complete. They developed deep antipathy towards westernization and western ways of living and thinking.

The religious tradition was the only prop they could resort to and draw psychological strength from. Ayatollah Khomeini, both through his suffering at the hands of the Shah and radical religious rhetoric, provided an alternative model which greatly inspired the people of Iran, specially the rural and urban poor and the traditional mercantile classes of Tehran and other towns and cities. In the given circumstances in Iran at the time, this model had tremendous appeal and provided the greatest thrust for change. It would be wrong to reject Iranian revolution as a sudden outburst of religious frenzy or sheer fanaticism inspired by the charismatic personality of Ayatollah Khomeini. The whole development, on the other hand, must be seen in its proper socio-political and developmental context. There is much to learn from what happened in Iran and to devise proper developmental strategies for the struggling people of Asia and Africa.

II

It is also necessary to analyse and understand why in the given situation like the one prevailing in Iran, religious rhetoric succeeded and Marxism failed to make any impact. Here we would also like to take up the second question raised in the beginning – development for what and also the third question how to bring about this transformation i.e. what strategy to be followed. As for the second question, it must be borne in mind that the process of development should not be seen by the masses as being amoral, let alone being immoral. Again, going back to Iranian situation, the whole process of socio-economic transformation was perceived by the people as immoral and hence incited deep revulsion. In the rapidly

developing situation, even the westernised middle classes joined the ranks of those so perceiving the situation. Again, as pointed out earlier, it would not do to seek explanation in religious bigotry, obscuranticism and illiberalism. This is precisely the idiom employed by western liberals who are the main beneficiaries of the process of development and who are looked upon by the masses with a sense of hostility, if not with a sense of downright hatred.

The process of development should be so designed as not to be perceived as violative of conventional morality, if it is to inspire and enthuse the masses. The sense of hostility increases manifold if the process of development is seen not only as breeding corruption but if it also leaves them out completely. This is what is happening today in most of the Asian and African countries. This is precisely the reason why religious fundamentalism is striking deeper and deeper roots in all these countries leaving most of us wondering as to why greater degree of economic development and spread of modern education results in strengthening, rather than weakening, religious conservatism. More educational and economic development, howsoever rational and scientific outlook, if it remains elite oriented and also amoral, even if not immoral.

This brings us to the third basic question posed earlier i.e. what developmental strategy to be followed. The foregoing discussion makes it clear that the strategy is to be so devised that firstly, it provides greatest benefit to the weakest sections of the society, does not uproot them from their socio cultural environs and secondly, does not deeply hurt their religio-cultural sensibilities. This, however, does not mean leaving superstitions or certain spiritually hollow, petrified conventional practices untouched, let alone encouraging them. Far from it. They must be attacked and eliminated. But such attacks would produce result only if the process of development is really beneficial to the masses and also if the campaign is so devised as to combining attack on such

paign is so devised as to combining attack on such practices with emphasis on certain positive aspects of given cultural complex which are rich and creative.

III

MARXISM AND RELIGIO-CULTURAL TRADITIONS

Marxist thinkers and ideologues in India in particular and in other countries of the third world in general have not shown much appreciation for native cultural sensibilities, let alone religious feelings. They too adopt western cultural idiom and elitist approach. Marxism is by and large defined in terms of economic goals rather than aiming at enriching spiritual and cultural life of the people, in an idiom which appeals to them. Thus there has not developed a genuine Marxist idiom, rooted in native cultural ethos. Marxism remains, more or less, a middle class elitist ideology and workers and peasants are drawn to it for limited economic goal and are left cold as far as their spiritual and cultural ethos are concerned. No wonder then, if they remain under the spell of fundamentalist, conservative and reactionary forces as far as the latter needs are concerned and, make no mistake, these needs are, in their case, as compelling and powerful as their economic needs. As such they remain religiously under the influence of highly conservative elements and are unable to change their outlook in this respect. Also, such conservative religiously-oriented parties like the Jamat-e-Islami float their own trade unions to keep workers under their total influence.

It is therefore highly necessary for the Marxists to evolve an integrated approach in religio-cultural and economic spheres rooted in the native ethos. It requires great deal of original and creative thinking and ingenious theorising. Western-oriented Marxist with all its paraphernalia would not cut much ice. It would also not do to ignore religion, let

alone opposing it. It is highly necessary to do some hard thinking on this subject. It is very short-sighted approach indeed to depict religion as 'opium' for the people and discard it. Religion, it must be remembered, is a powerful instrument and could be used either way – as an opium or as a revolutionary ideology. It becomes opium, as Marx puts it, only when it becomes 'sigh of the oppressed', the 'heart of the heartless world' and 'spirit of spiritless situation'.

Religion, however, is not always the sigh of the oppressed; it also becomes sword in their hands. It does not always act as opium to benumb the fighting vigour of the exploited; it also provides a powerful motivation to overthrow the status quo. There are several such instances. Buddhism, Christianity as well as Islam, all were powerful revolts against status quo. All three helped establish new revolutionary orders. Even Judaism earlier was a revolt led by Moses against Pharoah. Even in our own time what happened in Iran and in the Philippines proves this point. Islam in Iran and Christianity in the Philippines stood against the Shah and Marcos respectively.

It is true that these religions, in times to come, once again became powerful establishments and allies of status quo. But the same can be said of political revolutions as well and hence many revolutionaries often talked of 'permanent revolution'. Any revolution can degenerate if there is no constant watch and if men of unquestionable integrity are not in charge of its affairs and if revolution is allowed to turn into an establishment.

In fact it is no use discussing religion *per se* shorn of its socio-political context. Religion *per se* can be discussed only in philosophical sense. Thus Marx rightly points out in *Capital*: "Every history of religion even, that fails to take account of material basis, is uncritical. It is, in reality, much easier to discover by analysis the earthly core of the misty creations of

religion, than, conversely, it is, to develop from the actual relations of life the corresponding celestialized forms of those relations. The later method is the only materialistic, and therefore the only scientific one."[1] However, no Marxist has ever tried to develop such a corresponding celestialized form from actual relations of life. In other words, religion has to be seen in the concrete sociological conditions and its critique to be attempted only in the sociological context.

Religion, in my opinion, must be seen both in its sociological as well as its philosophical context. Religion can become opium or a revolutionary force depending firstly on concrete socio-political conditions and secondly who it is made to ally with: revolution or status quo. Religion in a philosophical sense is a different proposition altogether. It is then primarily a question of how one wants to relate oneself with the cosmos and how one wants to draw spiritual sustenance through this relationship and also how one gives meaning to one's life. Reason and science can help in exploring and understanding the universe but not in relating oneself with it. Theism and atheism both after all are philosophical positions. One chooses one or the other depending on his/her philosophical disposition and intellectual inheritance. Neither theism always implies rejection of material objectivity and scientific approach to empirical exploration nor atheism inevitably means doing away with spiritual aspects of life. Still an atheist or a theist may radically differ from each other in relating himself to the universe.

Religion, therefore, must be studied as a serious intellectual, spiritual and historical enterprise, rather than being brushed aside as a spiritual fraud, as often done by many rationalists. Engels rightly observes about Christianity: "A religion that brought the Roman world empire into subjection and dominated by far the larger part of civilized humanity for 1,800 years cannot be disposed of merely by declaring it to be

nonsense gleaned together by frauds. One cannot dispose of it before one succeeds in explaining its origin and its development from the historical conditions under which it arose and reached its dominating position. This applies to Christianity." [2]

He further observes very significantly, "The question to be solved, then, is how it came about that the popular masses in the Roman Empire so far preferred this nonsense – which was preached, into the bargain by slaves and oppressed – to all other religions that the ambitious Constantine finally saw in the adoption of this religion of nonsense the best means of exalting himself to the position of autocrat of the Roman world."[3]

IV

LIBERATION THEOLOGY

If religion is to be taken pretty seriously and an ally of revolution, progress and change, it must be divested of those theological aspects – which at best are later accretions – and were made part of it to serve not the oppressed but the oppressors. In other words, liberation of theology is needed to develop theology of liberation. Theology today by and large is monopolised by those who swear by status quo. It, therefore, tends to be highly ritualised, dogmatised and incomprehensibly metaphysical. It is only in this form that it can develop mystique of its own and keep the masses hypnotised. The theology of liberation must radically purge many of these elements. It is undoubtedly a challenging task, though of course, highly necessary. Religion cannot cease to be celestial but it cannot cut itself adrift from earthly matters too, from mainstream of life, if it has to retain its relevance. The historicity and contempraneity of religion on one hand, and, its mundane and celestial elements, on the other, must be fused

into a living, dynamic reality. Theology today is mere bundle of soulless rituals as far as toiling and oppressed masses are concerned. It is an abstract intellectual and metaphysical or mystical exercise for the middle class elite. In both these forms it serves the cause of status quo. It must be jettisoned of these soulless rituals as also of sheer metaphysical abstractions. It must become a soulful motivation for the oppressed to change their condition and a spiritual force to relate oneself meaningfully with and comprehend higher, spiritual aspects of reality.

V

ISLAM AND LIBERATION THEOLOGY

Islam was both a religion in technical sense and also a social revolution which posed powerful challenge to the oppressive structures of its time in and outside Arabia. Its basic thrust was towards universal brotherhood, equality and social justice. Firstly, it emphasised unity of mankind through the Quranic verse "O mankind, surely we have created you from a male and a female, and made you tribes and families that you may know each other. Surely, the noblest of you Allah is the most pious of you."[4] This verse clearly demolishes all notions and concepts of racial, tribal, national or familial superiority with one stroke and puts emphasis on piety. Piety, as far as the Quran is concerned is no mere ritual piety. The Quran defines piety in terms of justice – "Do justice; it is closest to piety."[5]

Secondly, as it can be seen from the above verse, Islam lays great emphasis on social justice in all its aspects. There can be no justice without the liberation of, and giving leadership to, the weaker and marginalised sections of the society. The Quran does not hesitate to entrust leadership of the whole earth to the *mustad'ifin* i.e. the weak. According to the

Quran they are the leaders and the inheritors of the earth. [6] It also enjoins on the faithfuls to fight for the liberation of the weak and the oppressed. "And what reason", says the Quran, "have you not to fight in the way of Allah, and for the weak among the men and the women and the children, who say: Our Lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and grants us from Thee a friend and grant us from Thee a helper."[7]

Thus it would be seen from the above verse that the Quran puts forward a theory of what can be termed as 'liberative violence'. The oppressors and the exploiters persecute the weak and readily use force to defend their interest. It is not possible to liberate the persecuted without fighting. In another verse the Quran enjoins upon the Muslims to fight until there is no more persecution.[8] The Quran categorically denounces *zulm* (oppression) and wrong doing. Allah, the Quran says, does not approve of harsh crying except by one who has been oppressed. [9]

In the context of Pharoah also the Quran, denouncing him as *zalim* (oppressor) and *mustakbir* (powerful, arrogant) again repeats that the weak shall inherit the earth: "And we made the people who were deemed weak to inherit the eastern lands and the western ones which we had blessed. And the good word of thy Lord was fulfilled in the Children of Israel – because of their patience. And we destroyed what Pharaoh and his people had wrought and what they had built." [10] It thus can be seen that Allah does not tolerate the structures of oppression and destroys them and this destruction is brought about through the oppressed themselves. Moses is projected as the leader of the oppressed by the Quran and he launches struggle to liberate the oppressed children of Israel.

If Mose was liberator of the enslaved Israelites, Muhammad was liberator of the whole of mankind through libera-

tion of the weak among them. He launched powerful struggle right at the outset against the rich and the mighty of Mecca. Even before he was commissioned as the prophet, he took active part in hilf al-fudul (association of the meritorious) which was formed to get justice for the weak and he ever remained proud of having joined this association.

Through the inspired words of Allah he threw challenge to the rich by strongly denouncing accumulation of wealth as it is this lust for accumulation which lead to exploitation and oppression. It describes accumulation of wealth as a burning fire which rises over the hearts and closes in on the accumulators. [11] The accumulation will thus put the whole society on fire and break it into pieces. Muhammad warned Meccans, and through rich Meccans the whole humanity. However, denunciation of accumulation of riches should not be misunderstood. Islam did not preach, like some other religions, renunciation in its place. It, on the other hand, encourages reasonable consumption provided it is legitimate and not earned through exploitation, injustice or fraud. In this connection the verses 10:93, 16:73, 17:70, 20:81, 23:51, 40:94, 45:16 are indicative of the Quranic outlook.

In all these verses, the key term used for consumption is *taiyyib* which literally means good, agreeable, healthy, pleasant. However, the context of these verses clearly shows that the Quran uses this term for social health and social good. The Quran thus permits consumption provided it is agreeable physically and such as not to disturb social health. The concept of social health is very fundamental to an Islamic society and it can be achieved only through distributive justice. Thus the Quran says: "Eat of the good things (*taiyyibat*) wherewith we have provided you, and transgress not in respect thereof lest my wrath come upon you ..." [12]

It would be seen here that Allah clearly warns that consume good things but do not transgress as transgression in-

vites his wrath, i.e. if few rich in the society consume in excess whereas others are deprived of it it would lead to great turmoil in the society which is described as 'Allah's wrath' in a theological idiom. This is not my own construction. It is more clearly stated in another verse: "And when we would destroy a township we send commandments to its people who lead easy lives and they commit abomination therein and so the word (of doom) becomes effective and we annihilate it with complete annihilation."[13]

Here it is less of theological and more of a secular idiom and it is made clear that a town gets destroyed when its rich (those who lead easy lives) transgress all limits in consumption and hence it is distributive justice which can prevent such disaster. In yet another verse the Quran makes it clear that all that is more than one's basic needs should be given away for the needy and the poor.[14]

Here another important question arises. How the objective of social justice to be achieved? Through charity or through compulsory extraction of surplus? Islam rules out neither. It must be remembered that fundamental values remain unchanged whereas instrumental values change with the changing material circumstances. Equality is fundamental value whereas the institution through which equality is achieved represents instrumental value. In medieval ages the institution of charity was used to bring about semblance of socio-economic justice. In modern times the same can be achieved through either state welfarism or socialistic planning or by restricting, or even abolishing, right to property in certain spheres.

The Quran does talk of charity in the socio-economic context in which it was revealed but does not glorify it as an ultimate or permanent institution. It is aware of the fact that it can injure human dignity and cautions accordingly. It says, "Those who spend their wealth for the cause of Allah and af-

terward make no reproach and injury to follow that which they have spent; their reward is with their Lord...." [15] It also says, "A kind word with forgiveness is better than alms giving followed by injury."[16]

Charity was indispensable in the context of time and has remained indispensable until our own time, specially in the capitalist society. In socialist society, too, it has not disappeared completely though of course causes are quite different. In Russia, for example, donations are made for the peace movement as well as for privately run religious institutions like churches and mosques. Such causes would continue to motivate human charitable instinct in future too. Thus charity may not be done away with altogether. Thus the Quran also encourages it but does not approve of causing any injury to human dignity.

To cause least injury to human dignity, the Quran levied *zakat*, a form of wealth and income tax combined. It was made a compulsory levy for all faithfuls. The Prophet established state treasury – *bait al-mal* – to collect and distribute the levy to the needy, the poor, orphans, widows, to pay off the debits of the indebted and to free the slaves. It was made obligatory for the state to look after the needs of the weaker sections of the society. However, for the reasons not to be discussed here, these liberative aspects of the Quran and the Prophet's *sunna* (practice) were soon pushed aside and main emphasis laid on rituals and personal laws as formulated by the latter theologians. These aspects unfortunately came to be accepted as the main thrust of Islam. It was not so during the Prophet's lifetime and for a brief period thereafter. The liberative aspects of Islamic theology came to be discarded with the emergence of dynastic rule first of the Umayyads and then of the Abbasids. The liberative aspects never came to be emphasised again as far as the mainstream Islam was concerned. However, it did see its emergence in the heterodox move-

ments like those of Khawarij, Quramita and others.

Right to property is not absolute as far as the Quran is concerned. Notionally, the land as well as all other properties belong to Allah and through Allah to the society as a whole. Private property as means of production was not permitted by the prophet. Land was the main form of means of production then. The Prophet not only prohibited share cropping, he also prohibited retention of land by those who do not cultivate it. Shafi 'I, an eminent jurist and founder of one of the four schools of jurisprudence maintains in his *Kitab al-Umm* that if a person gives a bare land to a tiller with the stipulation that the latter will get a share of the crop – it is muhagala, mukhabara, and muzara'a (i.e. Terms for share cropping) which were prohibited by the Prophet. (See *Kitab al-Umm*, vol. VIII, P-102). Ibn Hazm, another eminent jurist of literalist persuasion (Zahiri school) argues on the basis of the Quranic doctrine *al-hurumat qisas*[17] that inviolable rights must be paid for in equivalent wages. Thus a tiller's right is as inviolable as that of a landlord.[18]

It would also be of great interest to mention here the views of a prominent companion of the Prophet, Abu Dharr. He had caught the real revolutionary spirit of Islam. To him Islamic brotherhood was meaningless without its emphasis on socio-economic equality. It was its very core. He was highly critical of the Umayyad's policy of appropriating large estates. He strongly protested against Mu'awiyah's[19] attempt to change the nomenclature *mal al-muslimin* (wealth of Muslims) to *mal al-Allah* (wealth belonging to Allah) for its obvious implication that is then could be easily appropriated without accountability to the Muslims.

Justice, in economic, social and political matters is very central to the teachings of Islam. Ibn Taymiyya, a distinguished jurist of medieval period considers justice so central that he says, "The affairs of men in this world can be kept in

order with justice and a certain connivance in sin, is better than pious tyranny. This is why it has been said that God upholds the just state even if it is unbelieving, but does not uphold the unjust state even if it Muslim. It is also said that the world can endure with justice and unbelief, but not with injustice and Islam."[20]

These are but some of the aspects of liberation theology in Islam. There are several other matters which cannot be dealt with here in view of limitation of space. Suffice it to say that one cannot conceive of Islamic teachings and their real thrust, if divorced from the concept of socio-economic justice, equality of sex as well as race, freedom and dignity of man.

NOTES

1. See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York, 1964), p. 137.
2. Frederick Engels *Brune Bauer and Early Christianity, On Religion,* op. cit., p. 195.
3. Ibid.
4. *The Quran,* 49 : 13.
5. Ibid. 5 : 8.
6. Ibid. 28 : 5.
7. Ibid. 4 : 75.
8. Ibid. 8 : 39.
9. Ibid. 4 : 148.
10. Ibid. 7 : 137.
11. Ibid. 104 : 6-8.
12. Ibid. 20 : 81.
13. Ibid. 17 : 16.
14. Ibid. 2 : 219.
15. Ibid. 2 : 262.
16. Ibid. 2 : 263.
17. Ibid. 2 : 194.

18. Zia-ul-Haque, *Landlord and Peasant in Early Islam* (Delhi, 1985), p. 80.
19. Mu'awiyah was the first Umayyad Caliph.
20. Ibn Taymiya, *Public Duties in Islam*, English tr. Muhtar Holland. (U.K., 1983), p. 95.

8

ISLAM AND THE CHALLENGE OF POVERTY

Asghar Ali Engineer

I

Religion, according to its Latin origin *religio*, means consciousness and piety on one hand, and to tie, or to bind on the other. Religion, in other words, can be defined as a set of spiritual and metaphysical doctrines binding together all those who subscribe to them. Religion also becomes, over a period of time, a system of significations, symbols and rituals providing a deep sense of identity in a complex world to exist where in itself is an existential challenge. Also, religion in the history of human beings, had its origin as a project of quest of life, truth and ultimate destiny. However, negatively speaking, this quest for truth often loses its dynamism and gets crystallised in the form of immutable dogmas. Soon a set of complex rituals arise around these dogmas providing psychological solace and a sense of symbolic fulfilment for the faithfuls.

A few privileged casuists on the other hand, pursue metaphysical questions so abstract in nature that neither do they have any links with existential human problems nor with any sublime human destiny. Religion for them becomes a sterile intellectual exercise. Religion thus neither serves as a dynamic ethical and moral code inspiring its followers to lead spiritually meaningful life within the space of essential material needs nor does it provide guidance for sublimating hu-

man destiny and integrating it with the cosmogenic process. In other words, religion becomes a set of dead rituals for the masses on one hand, and, a set of abstract, incomprehensible metaphysical doctrines, on the other.

If religion has to be meaningful project, closely integrated with human destiny, both in its mundane and sublime sense, it will have to be liberated from sterile rituals and theological casuistry. However, this task is not easy to accomplish. Masses, at the most primitive level of existence, materially as well as intellectually, need ritualised religion; oppressed and persecuted, they cling to it for mental solace. They dive into it to drink nectar but remain drowned in a sea of misery. The privileged casuists and theologians on the other extreme are intoxicated with their intellectual abstractions, enjoying full patronage of the established order and mortally afraid of disturbing it. Their jargonised metaphysical abstractions fill in the interstices of the hollow establishment and try to save it from final collapse.

A religion, if it has to ensure social health, and avoid becoming merely a source of mental solace and acceptance of miserable existence, will have to transform itself into a powerful instrument of social change, an active agent challenging the decrepit social order having inbuilt socio-legal and politico-economic mechanism to perpetuate privileges and powers of a few upper castes and classes. The fundamental question, therefore, is: Can religion lend itself to playing such a role without violating its real spirit and legitimate role? My answer is in the affirmative, though often a contrary view has been held by religionists and theologians. However, in my opinion certain major historical religions like Buddhism, Christianity and Islam are imminently suited to play this role. The theologies of these religions, due mainly to the circumstances of their origin are truly useful.

These religions were, to begin with, powerful protest

movements not only against established religions but also against the prevailing power-structure. While the Buddhist philosophy (Buddha's proclaimed agnosticism and his this-wordly pragmatic approach did not lend Buddhism to evolving a theology in the traditional sense) stressed abolition of *dukha*; Christian and Islamic theologies, in their early non-speculative phases, identified themselves with the oppressed. It was only much later that these theologies became part of powerful established empires and began to lose their militant character.

Here I wish to make another important point. A theology, even if derived from revealed scriptural text, remains partly situational-contextual in character and partly normative-meta-physical. The militant fighting character predominates when theology remains identified with the oppressed masses and speculative metaphysical elements begin to predominate as it begins to identify itself with the establishment which becomes into existence with the religious movement in the later phase. Christian and Islamic theologies both suffered the same fate over a period of time. Both the theologies came under the shadow of neo-platonian speculative philosophy and became highly metaphysical in character. These theologies lost contact with the common people and hence lost militancy and dynamism in the process.

II

In order to meaningfully discuss the problem of *Islam and the Challenge of Poverty* it is important to understand the Quranic approach to certain related problems. The Quranic prophets, as the Iranic Islamic thinker 'Ali Shari'ati rightly points out, are part of the masses, not of any ruling establishment or ruling chieftains (with a few exceptions like David and Solomon). The holy Quran clearly states that "*he is*

who has sent a messenger amongst the masses from among them" (62.2. emphasis supplied). Thus it would be seen that the Quran emphasises the fact that God sends His messengers for the people and from amongst them. These messengers stand by the people and never identify themselves with the rulers or with the ruling classes (mala, ruling chiefs).

When the prophet Nuh (Noah) began to preach among his people the arrogant chieftains rejected his message and ridiculed him. "The chieftains of his people" (*Qaum*), says the Quran, "who disbelieved", said, "We see you but a mortal like us, and we see that the lowliest amongst us follow you without deep thinking. We see no merit in you above us and we deem you liars." (11:27). Again in yet another chapter the Quran says, "And we sent not unto any township a warner, but its affluent ones declared: Lo! we are disbelievers in that which you bring unto us. And they say: We are more (than you) in wealth and children. We are not punished" (34:33:36).

The Quran, in keeping with its approach, describes the rulers, chieftains and those who stand by them as *mustkbirin* (arrogant, drunk with power) and the ruled, or the masses of people as *mustad'ifin* (weakened, oppressed). The messengers of God naturally arise from amongst the weak and fight for their liberation from the clutches of the oppressors. Prophet Moses fought against the mighty Pharaoh for liberating Israelite who were being oppressed at his hands. Pharaoh was thus *mustakbir* (arrogant oppressor) and the Israelis *mustad'ifin* the weak and the oppressed). The entire ruling class supported the Pharaoh in this struggle, according to the Quran. "The chiefs of Pharaoh's people said, (O King), will thou suffer Moses and his people to make mischief (the ruling classes always dub any flight for justice as mischief, sedition or rebellion) in the land, and flout thee and thy gods? He said, We slay their sons and spare their women, for lo ! we are in power over them." (7:127).

Thus the Quran clearly and unambiguously stands with the weak in their struggle against their oppressors. It also laments, even reprimands those who do not come to the rescue of those who are being persecuted. Reprimanding them the Quran says, "Why should you not fight for the cause of Allah and the weak among men and of the women and the children who are saying: Our Lord ! bring us forth from out of this town of which the people are oppressors ! Oh give us from Thy presence some protecting friend ! Oh give us from Thy presence some defender ! " (4:75).

The Quranic theology thus not only strongly condemns exploitation, arrogance of power and oppression, it also enjoins upon the faithfuls to fight against these evils and come to the rescue of the weak and the oppressed as the above verse categorically indicates. Not only this, the Quran goes a step further and states its intention to put the weak and the oppressed in decisive leadership position. It says, "And We desired to show favour unto those who were oppressed on the earth, and to make them leaders and make them inheritors." (28:5).

Also, according to the Quran no township based on injustice and exploitation, can survive long. "How many a township", says the Quran, "have we destroyed while it was oppressive, so that it lieth (to this day) in ruins and (how many) a deserted well and lofty tower." (22:45).

Many more such verses can be quoted from the Quran which strongly condemn oppression and injustice. A tradition ascribed to the Prophet puts unbelief lower down the scale than oppression and injustice. This tradition says that a country can survive with this unbelief (*Kufr*) but not with its oppression (*zulm*). It is highly regrettable that later theological developments completely overshadowed this noble spirit of Islamic theology. We shall throw some light on this aspect a little later.

Mecca was experiencing acute social tension when the Prophet began to preach there. Apart from intertribal conflicts and rivalries, Meccan society was dogged with tensions caused by accumulation of wealth in a few hands and lack of distributive justice. Breaking the barrier of tribal structure, a powerful class of mercantile bourgeoisie was emerging in Mecca. The tribal relations of production, in other words, were giving way to mercantile economy base on exchange. There of course continued handicraft production by individual artisans or groups of them. There also continued traces of pastoral economy of which we have evidence in the holy Quran, as well as in the early history of Islam. However, the commercial economy was becoming predominant.

The merchants began to accumulate wealth neglecting the tribal norms. The mercantile culture casts its shadow over the tribal one. The poor, needy and orphans began to be neglected giving rise to social tensions. There developed acute discontent among these weaker sections of the Meccan society. The Prophet felt deeply distressed at this state of affairs. We can clearly sense deep concern for destitutes of the society in some of the early Meccan verses which strongly condemn arrogance of the Meccan rich and their neglect of the poor, needy and orphans. "Hast thou observed him who belies religion? That is he who repels the orphan. And urges not the feeding of the needy." (107:1-3). Here it should be noted that believing of religion has been equated with repelling the orphan and denying food to the needy. This is very important social dimension of Quranic theology and the one very useful for meeting the challenge of poverty.

The Quran also condemns, in no uncertain terms, accumulation of wealth and arrogance generated thereby. The Quran says in no uncertain terms, "Woe unto every slandering trader. Who hath gathered wealth and counts it. He thinks that his wealth will render him immortal. Nay, but verily he

will be flung to the Consuming One. Ah what will convey unto thee what the Consuming One is ! (it is) the fire of Allah kindled, which leapeth up over the hearts (of men). Lo! it is closed in on them, in outstretched columns" (104).

Here the whole imagery is worth noting. The one who accumulates wealth and counts it (without distributing it judiciously) will be thrown into the Consuming One which is defined as the fire kindled by Allah. The traditional theologians mean hell fire thereby – in the world hereafter. But one can hardly miss its immediate social context. One needs to evolve what I would like to call socio-theological approach to the Quranic verses in order to understand their correct import. The Meccan society, on account of fast developing disparities of wealth, was on the verge of getting caught into social turmoil. The Prophet with his acute sense of social concern had clearly sensed the gathering storm. Through the revealed verses, this situation was depicted in appropriate diving imagery. Thus the kindled fire of Allah would also mean the social turmoil into which the Meccan society could have been caught due to the disparities of wealth . Seen in this context we can better appreciate all such verses in the Quran revealed specially in the early Meccan period. It became an integral part of the Quranic theology that the wealth be justly distributed and should not remain concentrated in the hands of the rich. "That it (i.e. Wealth) should not circulate between the rich among you." (57:7). This Quranic approach remained unchanged even in the later Medinese period. There is strong denunciation of concentration of wealth in the Medinese chapter *Al-Taubah* (Repentance). "They who hoard up gold and silver and spend it not in the way of Allah, unto them give tidings (O Muhammad) of a painful punishment." (9:34).

Needless to say if the challenge of poverty is to be met, social structure free from exploitation, oppression and concentration of wealth in a few hands will have to be built. An-

other kingpin of such a society is justice in social, economic, legal and political sense. The Quran lays great stress on justice and uses terms like *'adl* and *qist* for the purpose. Also, *'adl* and *ihsan* (justice and benevolence) are again the two key terms employed by the Quran for stressing the need for economic justice. One also has to be just in economic transactions. "That you exceed not the measure. But observe the measure strictly." (55:8-9). It is also necessary to achieve economic justice and balance that while reasonable needs for food, shelter, etc. be met, the tendency for extravagance be curbed.

The Quran requires the faithful to avoid extravagance. "O children of Adam", says the Quran, "Look to your adornment at the every place of worship and eat and drink, but be not prodigal. Lo ! He loves not the prodigals." (7:31). We know that the advanced capitalist societies of the West based on structures of oppression and exploitation are affluent and plunder the economic resources of the third world for their prodigious expenditure and maintain unreasonably high standards of living at the cost of the poorest in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The ostentatious consumerist culture of the west in proving to be the greatest curse for the poor of the world. The socialist economies, on the other hand, while ensuring reasonable level of basic necessities, positively discourage ostentatious consumerism. The stress in such economies is on production of wage goods rather than luxury goods. The world economy can achieve balance only if the western economies avoid extravagance and plundering the resources of the third world perpetuating poverty therein. But as we know the North-South dialogue has not succeeded despite repeated attempts on the part of developing countries of the South. The countries of the North refuse to give substantial aide to boost the economies of the countries of the South. They refuse to commit even 2 percent of the gross

product by way of aid to these under-developed countries. The challenge of poverty cannot be met if such an imbalance continues in the economies of the North and the South.

Looking to the complex problems of world economy today, economic justice can be established in order to fight the challenge of poverty only if the concept of justice is treated not only in economic, but also in social and political sense. The concept of justice should be as comprehensive as possible. The Quranic concept of justice, it would be seen on a careful study of its verses, is quite comprehensive in this sense. After saying that "say: My Lord enjoineth justice" (7:29), it goes on the say, "O you who believe! Be you staunch in justice, witnesses for Allah, even though it be against yourselves or (your) parents or (your) kindred whether (the ease be of) a rich man or poor man, for Allah is nearer unto both (than you are). So follow not passion lest you lapse (from truth)" (4:135) ....

In yet another verse the Quran requires of the faithfuls, "O you who believe! Be steadfast witnesses for Allah in equity, and let not hatred of any people seduce you that you deal not justly. Deal justly, that is nearer to piety. Observe your duty to Allah. ... " (5:8).

From the verses quoted above it would be seen that the doctrine of justice propounded by the Quran is not only comprehensive but also rich. It requires of the faithfuls that even the hatred of other people should not come in their way of dispensing justice. One has to be just even if it goes against oneself, against one's parents and relations and that justice is an integral part of *taowah* (i.e. piety). Piety does not lie merely in praying and fasting and abstinence but also in being rigorously just. And it is obvious that the battle against poverty cannot be fought without being just in its most rigorous sense.

The modern capitalist system is highly exploitative and

so perpetrates unjust socio-economic structures. Within its framework neither social, nor economic nor political justice is conceivable, specially of the Quranic variety discussed above. Even if the political rule does not precisely correspond to the class rule in the Marxist sense in the modern democratic societies due mainly to mass pressure, one can hardly deny the hegemony of capitalist class and their exploitative practices. Any form of exploitation of one human being by another human being is an acute form of injustice and cannot square with the Islamic doctrine of justice. There are other reasons as well why modern capitalist society cannot keep pace with the Islamic weltanschauung.

Islam, as pointed out above, is opposed to extravagance and lays stress on keeping needs under control (it should not be, under any circumstances, construed to mean renunciation as the same has been positively disapproved of by Islam). The Quran also requires of the faithfuls to give away what is superfluous (after meeting one's controlled needs). The capitalist society, on the other hand, perpetuates itself by creating artificial needs through high pressure publicity. The noted American sociologist Vance Packard in his books like *Hidden Persuaders* has systematically exposed the working of advertising agencies and their methodologies. He shows how, based on false claims, high pressure publicity, persuades in very subtle ways, the people to buy. Most sophisticated techniques are used by the advertising industry to create artificial needs so that the products, primarily aimed at making profit, can sell well in the market. It becomes the very rationale of the capitalist society.

It can also be very well understood by the perceptive observers that the high pressure publicity techniques work much more efficiently in affluent societies of the west which owe their affluence to the plunder of the third world, as already pointed out. Thus the injustice of the capitalist econ-

omy gets compounded. Creating artificial needs among affluent people (who owe their affluence to exploitation of the poor) is injustice compounded. The affluent North refuses to render economic help to the poor and undeveloped South because it does not want to cut into the artificially maintained high standard of living thus endangering capitalist profits. The holy Quran, on the other hand, exhorts its followers to control the needs and give away the superfluous for those who are deprived and dispossessed. And, for the reasons explained, this is not possible within the framework of a capitalist society and hence it cannot meet the challenge of poverty.

Vance Packard, in his another equally remarkable book, *The Waste Makers* shows convincingly how waste making is an integral part of American capitalism. In fact without waste making on colossal scale the wheels of industries in capitalist societies cannot run. Again, the greater the affluence the higher is the degree of waste in the economy. The usable products are destroyed so that the new products might sell in the market under the label of new 'models' without increased use-values, as is convincingly shown by Vance Packard in his series of books referred to above. This too is an unpardonable crime as far as Islamic ethics is concerned. Islam neither approves of extravagance nor of wasting valuable resources. Western affluence, generated by capitalist exploitation of the third world, perpetuates both the crimes against humanity and its future generations who would also be deprived of these un-replenishable resources due to their colossal waste by the present generation. Thus war against poverty would be very difficult to win for the future generations, if capitalism is left unleashed.

The Prophet of Islam hated poverty and starvation. There are number of *hadith* (traditions) ascribed to him to this effect. A tradition reported by Nissi says, "O Lord I seek refuge in Thee from poverty, scarcity and indignity and I seek

refuge in Thee from being oppressed and from oppressing (others)." It is very significant tradition as it links poverty, scarcity, indignity and oppression, one aids and abets the other. The Prophet, by seeking refuge from all this makes it incumbent on all the Muslims to declare war against poverty. Another tradition reported by Abu Daud says, "O Lord I seek refuge in Thee from *Kufr* (unbelief) and poverty." Thus it is made unmistakably clear that *Kufr* and *faqr* (unbelief and poverty) both are equally condemnable. Yet another tradition reported by Baihaqui and Tibrani says, "Poverty, in all probability, leads to unbelief (*kufr*)."

All these traditions ascribed to the Prophet make it clear that a Muslim must declare war against poverty. Poverty is as condemnable as unbelief and as a Muslim should fight against *kufr* he should fight against poverty. Perpetuating poverty amounts to perpetuating unbelief. Any ism or system which seeks to thrive on perpetuating poverty, starvation and need, must be fought against, be it feudalism or capitalism. Thus war against poverty becomes an integral part of Islamic faith.

There are several related questions as far as Islam and war against poverty is concerned. Some of these questions have been hotly debated and have raised storm of controversy. One of the fundamental questions in this regard is that of property. Another important question, though of different nature, is pertaining to *riba* i.e. Interest. It is important to throw some light on these fundamental questions, if we want to grapple with the problem of poverty and war against it in the light of Islamic ideology.

Before launching out on discussion of these fundamental problems, it is necessary to make one thing clear. I do not consider the concept "Islamic economics" as valid. Islam is religion whereas economics is a positive science. Islam, as a religion, provides us with a set of norms and values, not with

scientific analysis or system. 'Islamic economics, if at all such a term is there it could be used only in a normative sense, not in a positive sense of scientific and conceptual analysis. There have been of late some serious attempts at developing the concept of 'Islamic economics' both in a normative and positive sense. But it is difficult to accept this concept in the latter sense scientifically speaking.

Syed Nawab Haider Naqvi, in his book *Ethics and Economics : An Islamic Synthesis* (The Islamic Found. U.K., 1981) points four axioms of Islamic system, namely Unity, Equilibrium, Free Will and Responsibility which are obviously all normative and value-oriented. He also points out in this connection, "It is important to note that the fundamental axioms themselves are déprived not through any logical process, but through observations or by posting a value judgement about their universality." (p. 31).

We will discuss the question of property, *riba'*, etc. keeping this distinction between the normative and positive in mind and that the Islamic teachings and doctrines are normative and do not constitute any positive science.

III

PROPERTY OR POVERTY ?

The traditional theologians have steadfastly maintained that the right to property is sacrosanct in Islam and cannot be tampered with. The Saudi theologians even took the view that nationalisation is not permitted in Islam in view of this right to property. But, on a deeper view of the problem, this position is hardly sustainable. We have already seen that the Quran not only makes strong plea for taking care of the poor and needy, it intends to make the *mustad'ifin* (the weaker sections) inherit the earth and also the leadership of the mankind. The case of helping the needy and poor constituting the

weaker sections of the society has been repeatedly emphasized (though certainly not deemed) but has been subjected to the rights of the deprived sections of the society.

The Quran states categorically, "And in their wealth the beggar (or needy) and the deprived (who does not beg but nevertheless is needy) had due share." (51:19). This verse thus makes it very clear that the right to wealth or property is not absolute but is subject to the share of weaker sections of the society. We have also seen in the foregoing discussion that where there is accumulation of property among a small section of a society, poverty is bound to result in the larger section of that society (unless that society, like the western capitalist society keeps itself affluent by plundering other less developed societies). This applies much more to industrial society which is based on production and appropriation of surplus value than to a commercial society which is based on appropriation of exchange value.

Thus one has to decide between property and poverty. The crucial question is Property or Poverty? As far as Islam is concerned, the Quranic verses and the prophetic traditions make it abundantly clear that in the war against poverty, the right to property cannot be treated as inviolable. In fact due share will have to be apportioned for the needy and the deprived. It is also important to discuss here the question of property in an industrial economy. The extent of the property owned by individuals in a mercantile economy differs quantitatively as well as qualitatively from the one owned by huge cartels, corporations and multinationals in a modern industrial economy.

The economic might of huge multinational corporations owned by Americans are greater than the combined economies of some of the smaller Asian and African countries. The appropriation of the surplus produced by the sweat and toil of the workers keeps on adding to the economic might of

these monopolies and multinational corporations. These corporations, using their strangulating hold over economies of the poorer nations, dictate terms and unreasonable prices and are thus largely responsible for perpetuating poverty in these countries. One can quote here the most recent example of Nigeria. Its economy has been nearly ruined as it refused to bow down to the dictates of the multinational oil corporations.

Islam was confronted with mercantile economy when the Prophet was preaching. It opposed and strongly attacked concentration of wealth even in a mercantile economy. How could it then allow right to private property remain inviolable in an industrial era? How nationalization could be ruled out, if it becomes necessary for supporting the cause of weaker sections of society? But either the theologians do not understand the intricacies of industrial economy or support the status quo as they themselves depend on it. We will throw some more light on the question of nationalization a little later.

IV

CHARITY OR SHARING OF WEALTH ?

The traditional theologians have argued that Islam wants to meet the challenge of poverty by encouraging charity called *sadaqah*. It is true the Quran talks of *sadaqah*. Charity was one of the ways of combating poverty or reducing its rigours in a mercantile economy in those days. However, it was and is not the only way. The Quran, as already pointed out, talks of the share of the needy and the deprived in the wealth and share is much more than charity, a right, not mere supplication. The Quran was also aware of the limitations of charity. The sense of superiority of the giver and that of indignity of the taker often makes it less than worthwhile.

The Quran uses an appropriate simile to explain the in-

herent shortcoming of such a charity. It goes on to say, "O you who believe! Render not vain your almsgiving by reproach and injury like him who spends his wealth only to be seen of men and believes not in Allah and the Last Day. His likeness is as the likeness of a rock whereupon is dust of earth; a rainstorm smites it, leaving it smooth and bare. They have no control of aught of that which they have gained. Allah guides not the disbelieving folk." (2:264).

Thus the Quran emphasizes the element of reproach and injury involved in charity and that such a charity is washed away as the dust from the rock in a rainstorm as the same is without any roots. From this verse the Quran's attitude to charity is very obvious. It often carries the danger of reproach and injury to human dignity and hence cannot strike any firm roots in society. The limited effects, produced if any, by charitable acts, are destroyed through angry uprising of the deprived sections of society (rainstorm is metaphorical expression for angry uprising).

The next verse following the one quoted above is also quite meaningful in this aspect. Here is its text: "And the likeness of those who spend their wealth in search of Allah's pleasure and for the strengthening of their souls is the likeness of a garden on a height. The rainstorm smites it and it brings forth its fruit twofold. And if rainstorm smites it not, then the shower. Allah is seer of what you do." (2:265).

The verse could mean to refer to true charity which is done to earn Allah's pleasure. It is likened to a garden which brings forth twofold fruit. It could also mean to signify of wealth through social institutions which does away with any possibility of reproach and injury, since charity in true spirit is so rare in view of human nature. If redistribution of wealth is brought about through well-devised socio-economic institutions, it would generate mass enthusiasm resulting in redoubled efforts and increase in production twofold.

V

TRUSTEESHIP OR SOCIAL OWNERSHIP ?

Some theologians and modernists have also argued in favour of theory of trusteeship. This theory has been propounded as, according to the Quran, Allah is the real owner of all that is between heaven and earth. It is, therefore, argued that man is not the owner of his wealth but holds in it trust. God has entrusted wealth to him to spend on the needy and the poor. He only possesses wealth for the welfare of others. Tolstoy, Mahatma Gandhi and several others have also propounded similar theory. It seems to be quite splendid in theory. However, it assumes that man is motivated in his actions by idealism alone. It is far from true. The whole history negates this assumption. Had the man been motivated by idealism alone, the whole history of mankind would have been very much different. The earth would have long been a paradise. Human beings have a highly complex nature. They are motivated by ideals but not always so; they are motivated by selfish desires more than the ideal motives.

There are very few examples, besides that of the Prophet and few of his companions, in the entire history of Islam, of Muslim individuals and rulers who can be said to have held political power or wealth as a real trustee of God. The very early history of Islam is full of bloody strife both for pclitical power and possession of wealth. It was for nothing that Abu Dhar Al-Chifari, that eminent companion of the Prophet had to fight against all those companions of the Prophet and other Muslims who had begun to misuse political power for amassing wealth and its ostensible display. But Abu Dhar met with a tragic end. He was exiled and died a lonely man. His fervent protests proved to be ineffective and amassing of wealth began on a large scale.

While advocating any idealist theory like that of trustee-

ship one will have to bear all these complexities in mind. What is happening in the Islamic world today should also serve as an eye opener to the advocates of such theories. Despite so much talk of Islamization in several Islamic countries no serious attempt has been made in any one of them for establishing just socio-economic structures. Disparities of wealth so fervently denounced by the Quran continue and the upper classes indulge in conspicuous consumption while the poorer sections continue to suffer. The ruling classes who are the main beneficiaries of the status quo have not accorded any priority to the economic questions in their Islamization programme. Only a half-hearted attempt is made to establish interest-free banks keeping the present economic structure intact. We will discuss the question of interest-free economy presently.

What could be the alternative to the trusteeship theory? Does the theory of social ownership fit into the Quranic framework? Let it be clearly understood that the Quran, as explained earlier, does not advocate any specific theory; it only lays down certain norms and emphasizes some values. It condemns oppression and exploitation and makes justice obligatory on its followers. What is therefore primary in Islam is putting an end to all forms of oppression and exploitation and establishing a just society by evolving suitable socio-economic formations. It is from here that the boundary of scientific approach to the economic problem begins. The nature of theory should be such as to take Islamic value system into account on one hand, and, should result in mitigating socio-economic injustices in the society, on the other.

It should also be borne in mind that the nature of socio-economic institutions, theories and practical measures would vary with the nature of socio-economic formations. What is valid or efficacious in a tribal, feudal or mercantile economy may not necessarily be valid in an industrial economy. While

the fundamental values should not be tampered with (what we can term as huded Allah i.e. limits of God in the Quranic parlance) the socio-economic institutions must be reconstructed or changed in order to retain the efficacy of the values divinely inspired or intuitively gained. I would like to elaborate with reference to the point under discussion.

The institution of *sadaqah* (charity) could serve the end of mitigating the rigours of economic injustice in an emerging mercantile society or in a feudal society. While the overall spirit of the Quranic concept of socio-economic justice is much more radical it could not have been realizable to the same degree in a tribal-cum-mercantile society. It has to be tempered suitably in the prevailing socio-economic milieu. The institutions had to be so devised as to meet the demands of the situation. Much too great a degree of radicalism in non-congenial milieu can defeat the very purpose sought to be achieved. Advocacy of non-pragmatic radicalism has often been the bane of many revolutions. Even a revolutionary like Linen had to condemn certain measures advocated by a section of Bolsheviks as 'infantile communism'.

The concept of *sadaqah* in the Quran must be seen in this light rather than a permanent institution as sought to be done by theologians and others averse to any change. Only values are permanent, not the social institutions which serve those values in particular circumstances. It would be unfortunate to treat institutions as permanent at the cost of those fundamental values. The Quran was not satisfied, even in those circumstances with the mere concept of voluntary charity. It categorically states. "Takes alms from their wealth wherewith you may purify them and may make them grow. ..." (9:103). Thus *zakah* is to be taken from their wealth so that the needy and the poor may be taken care of and the wealth and society may grow in harmony.

It does not require much argument to conclude that tra-

ditional institution of charity can not meet the challenge of poverty in an industrial economy, especially in the third world which includes India. New socio-economic institutions will have to be fashioned to meet this formidable challenge. Private property cannot be left untouched in the hands of few, if the Quranic spirit is to be upheld. One will have to choose between property and poverty and the Quranic choice is abundantly clear. Private property cannot be treated as sacred and inviolable although it does not mean abolishing private property altogether.

Thus Mr. S. N. H. Naqvi also maintains, "... It should be clear that a substantial dilution, through direct and indirect policies, of the institution of private property must form the kingpin of any egalitarian Islamization programme. This is particularly true to those Muslim countries that live under oppressive feudalistic systems. The most objectionable element of the private property system is handed property, which serves no useful economic functions whatsoever. No economic harm will be done, indeed, great social benefits will flow – if all landed property were to be confiscated by the State in one clean sweep and cultivated on its behalf." (*Ethics and Economics*, ibid, p. 149).

In fact Mr. Naqvi raises important question here. In the countries of the third world there cannot be any effective solution of the problem of poverty without implementing land reforms. However, it is hardly on the agenda of any Islamic country publicising its "Islamization" programme. Pakistan for example, very badly needs implementation of land reforms. The big landlords are very powerful and no government enjoying their support can dare touch their lands. Zia's "Islamization" does not make even an indirect reference to any such programme. The committee of expert economists appointed by the Zia regime stressed the urgent need for such reforms but the report was shelved.

The Committee, in its report, advocating land reform, says; "In addition to this land reforms should be introduced to reduce the size of the family holding of land. Steps should also be taken to promote the Islamic system of partnership tenancy in place of the wide spread practice of hiring out bare land for fixed rent which according to some Faqaha (theologians), is formally equivalent to ribah. Furthermore, there is, the explicit Islamic position that land not cultivated for three consecutive years should be taken away by the State, without paying any compensation to their owners, and given to those who can cultivate it." (*An Agenda for Islamic Economic Reforms*, mimeographed report prepared by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics, Islamabad).

Needless to say no such radical land reforms are cultivated by the Zia regime. Its Islamization programme does not go beyond imposing certain Islamic punishments for theft and adultery and in the economic field beyond establishing interest-free banks which any way do not harm powerful vested interest responsible for perpetuating poverty. This clearly betrays the class character of the Zia regime. The other Islamic regimes have been no less than guilty in this respect.

As far as the Islamic value-system is concerned, one will have to give altogether a new interpretation to the idea of trusteeship of wealth. If an individual possessor of wealth is considered as its trustee, the desired result is not obtained. It becomes very difficult to demarcate between the rights of a possessor and an owner. In fact the possessors and owners can and do exercise virtually all the rights of owners. It is a well known fact that in high taxation economies, trusts are created by the rich and the wealthy, not to dispense benefits to the needy but to avoid taxes. They, at the same time, continue to exercise all the rights of ownership by retaining their control over the trusts. The government has to further legislate to curb such malpractices.

It would thus be seen that the concept of individual trusteeship of wealth is not adequate to meet the requirements of judicious distribution of social wealth in the society. The problem can be adequately grappled with only if the society as a whole is treated as a trustee of Allah and the social wealth is owned by it, including the means of production, in an industrial economy. The society as a whole should hold social wealth in good trust and develop and spend it in keeping with the objectives laid down by Allah. There is nothing wrong even if this happens to be in conformity to the socialist doctrine of social ownership of means of production. The Prophet is reported to have said that "Wisdom if the lost property of the faithful; he should acquire it whatever he finds it".

Another important dimension of social trusteeship of wealth is ecological in nature. The capitalist development, due to this greed for profit and accumulation, often ignores ecological considerations while ruthlessly exploiting natural resources. Ecology must be treated seriously while working out the strategy of economic development. Also, the imperialist countries have shown very scant regard for ecology in the third world in their greed to exploit it for keeping their standards of living very high. If the natural resources and means of production are controlled by the society as a whole, it would not be possible to do so. Yet another dimension of the problem is intergenerational use of the natural resources. The society must hold natural resources in trust for the coming generations too. They should not be exhausted for maintaining high standards for a few generations only. This is precisely what is happening with the oil resources of the Arab world. The ruling classes in the Arab world are selling millions of barrels of oil every year to the industrialised world of the west and themselves appropriating the revenues earned. The life styles of these ruling classes are becoming almost leg-

endary. An average family in Jeddah (Saudi Arabia) owns four cars.

The institution of social trusteeship would ensure that coming generations are not deprived of the benefits of natural wealth. The oil resources of the Arâbs, it is estimated by the noted economists like Samir Amin, may be exhausted within 30 years, if oil production is not curtailed. One must also bear another fact in mind that those who talk of the concept of Islamic *ummah* and reject the concept of nation-state are least inclined to share their wealth with the poorer Islamic nations like Bangladesh which is one of the poorest nations in the world. Thus Islamic *ummah* remains purely religious concept which is exploited politically by the rulers of the Islamic world but refuse to dispense economic benefits to the poor and needy of the *ummah* in other countries, symbolic financial aids apart.

One of the most fundamental doctrines of Islam is *tawhid* (unity of God). Traditional theologians have mostly concerned themselves to explaining its religious aspects. They have not received any serious attention so far. Unity of God should not be treated merely as a theological concept but also a sociological concept. It is precisely for this reason that the Quran opposed all distinctions based on tribes, races and nations and established the brotherhood of faithfuls. Also, divisions in a society are not merely ethnic in nature, they are also economic. They are termed as class divisions in the economic terminology. The latter divisions cause serious tensions and conflict in the society and no meaningful unity can be achieved if these divisions persist and keep on widening. If the divine unity reflects social unity – and it should, as per the Quranic spirit – then the *taehiai iqtisadiyat* (what could be roughly termed as Islamic economics) must minimize these economic disparities. Only a society free of ethnic, national, linguistic and class divisions can be an ideal *tawhidi* society.

I would also like to emphasize here that social situations are normally highly complex and human behaviour is not motivated by ideals alone but is governed by social situations also. Any theory which fails to take this fact into account cannot come to grips with social and human realities. Whatever the ideals, theological or metaphysical, ethnic, national and class divisions cannot be washed away very easily. The Quran is also fully aware of these social complexities and declares: "Had Allah willed, He could have made them one community, but Allah bringeth whom He will into His mercy. And the wrongdoers have no friend nor helper." (42:8).

This is very significant verse. It clearly implies the prevailing ethnic and other divisions and tensions and the problems of bringing about unity. "Had Allah willed He could have made them one community" is quite meaningful statement, i.e., if only ideal could bring about unity, they could have become one community but Allah guides His servants and leaves them with their social realities (of their own making) and to desire His mercy. Thus it is for the human beings to take initiative and seek His mercy i.e. strive to create a society free of these divisions and ensuring unity. Only those who try to mitigate these divisions and tension caused by them deserve His mercy. Those who cause these divisions to persist and tension to be aggravated stand in their way to forge unity and make them one community; it is for human beings, under His guidance, to strive to achieve the objective by minimizing these divisions and thus deserve His mercy. If they cause these divisions to persist they will face the consequences and will have no friends and helpers.

The question of property and poverty should also be looked into in this light. The right of property is not absolute, but neither can it be easily done away with. It poses numerous problems. The existing class divisions are very sharp. Concentration of property in a few hands undoubtedly ag-

gravates the problem of poverty among the masses but abolition of right to property can also not be achieved in one go. One may have to evolve, through trial and error, in right spirit and inspired by one's ideals, solutions to this problem in keeping with ones situation. Neither the abolition of right to property right away nor retaining it as absolute on can meet all possible situations. Both the solutions being extreme, do not take entire complexity of social situation into account. Extreme solutions are workable only in extreme situations, not in existing 'normal' situations.

Sudden abolition of right to property can throw up very complex problems severely affecting the economy. Immediately after the October Revolution in Russia severe restrictions on right to property were applied but after the days of war communism – extreme situation – a new economic policy (NEP) had to be adopted reversing some of these curbs. The economy would have otherwise been severely affected. Even on the question of the pace of collectivization there was bitter controversy among the Bolsheviks. Also, Mao Ze Dong's advocacy of establishing communes in one go met with severe resistance from other leaders and created serious economic as well as political problems. After his death the new leadership reversed many of these measures and permitted under the label of modernization, restoration of private plots on limited scale and also adopted 'responsibility' system both in fields and factories in order to boost production.

Thus it would be seen that the question of poverty can not be settled in a simplistic way. From this one should not conclude, as opponents of socialism often do, that tampering with the right to own property is against human nature and that there would be no incentive for production without it. All I intend to emphasize here is that much would depend on the prevailing situation. It is for this reason that the Quran neither upholds right to property as sacrosanct nor rejects it

altogether. While opposing exploitation and oppression and emphasizing socio-economic justice in no uncertain terms, it leaves concrete modalities of individual and social properties to be worked out in concrete situation.

It would be seen from the foregoing discussion that *adl* (justice) is the cornerstone of an economy based on Islamic values. To realize this concretely in a modern industrial economy it is not enough to establish interest free banks, collect *zakah* and *ushr* (on agriculture income) and emphasize charity. These measures are not enough to meet the challenge of poverty and establish social justice important though they are. The socio-economic institutions will have to be refashioned in order to establish distributive justice. The first important requirement is that one will have to view the problem in the context of totality of economy, not in piecemeal fashion. Production in modern economy is as important as distributive justice.

It has been argued that profit motive leads to maximizing of production and it also constitutes a just reward for the entrepreneur. And that just reward is in keeping with the Islamic principle. Those who know the working of modern industrial economy and its scale of operation would hardly be taken in by such arguments which used to be advanced in 19th century. Giant corporations and multinationals are not owned by an individual entrepreneur and his work ethics and his profit motive as was the case in the early stages of capitalism. These giant corporations are owned and manipulated by the powerful groups of super rich through the mechanism of buying controlling shares. The huge amounts of profit are pocketed by those who skilfully maneuver these controlling shares. The profit thus accrued is neither the result of hard work, nor that of proportionate investment. Such a profit is, therefore a result of speculation on the stock exchange and is *haram* (illegitimate), prohibited by Islam. It should also be borne in mind that the profit ob-

Islam. It should also be borne in mind that the profit obtained through commercial exchange, in which the individual owner and investor plays personal role through direct operations is not comparable with the profit obtained through production by workers and appropriated by remote entrepreneurs who do not play any direct role in its generation.

In a mercantile economy on the other hand profit is generated (rather distributed) through commercial transactions carried out by the investor himself. The prophet was faced with this situation in Meccan mercantile economy and it was the profit of this sort which was legitimized with a proviso that no speculation or other forms of malpractices like short weighting, short-measuring or advance trading are not resorted. Thus the two categories of profits should not be confused together.

Here we would like to throw some light on the meaning and concept of *riha'* itself. *Riha'* should not be understood in the context of modern industrial economy only as interest; its scope should be widened to include all the exploitative practices. Industrial profit would also fall in this category. Thus abolition of *riha'* should mean banning all exploitative practices including the profit earned by large scale modern industrial establishments. It is only then that the workers and other weaker sections of society would benefit. It is also a point to be noted that free enterprise-oriented industries in their hunt for profit are more interested in producing consumer goods for upper classes including consumer durables rather than wage-goods for the workers and other weaker sections which have much low profitability.

It becomes the responsibility of the society as a whole or the state to produce and supply such goods to the weaker sections of the society. Needless to say, this role can be effectively played by the nationalized sector. Large-scale indus-

tries will have to be nationalized both for curbing unethical consumerism as well as for establishing social justice, a cornerstone of an Islamic society.

PART FIVE

SIKHISM

9

SIKHISM AND HUMAN LIBERATION

Gurbhagat Singh

Sikhism is not a religion if the word means only "one of the systems of faith and worship" or just "a personal awareness or conviction of the existence of a supreme being."[1] It is a way of life, a cultural system that enlightens about living as liberated beings. The notion of personal freedom did exist in the form of *moksha* in Hinduism and as *nirvana* in Buddhism, but it bypassed the mediating structures that enforce and confirm freedom and change it into liberation. A person can be personally or individually free and still remain unliberated.

Freedom, or "emancipation" in the *Upanishads*, is the attainment of knowledge. That is, of knowing or beholding the "golden" author of the word, as the *Mundaka Upanishad* says. Knowing and becoming one with Brahma, is the disappearance of passion: *Shanti*.[2] It is a state of complete identity, as elaborated in the *Chandogya Upanishad* doctrine of "Thou art That". Later on, as A.B. Keith has rightly suggested, the *Vedanta* developed this notion of emancipated individual into the notion of *Jivan Mukta*, an individual who obtains release in perfection only in death although he is released in life by his attainment of knowledge.[3] In simple words, the notion of freedom or emancipation in the Hindu religious and philosophical tradition is confined to a kind of individual and personal knowing and thereby coming to a point where all emotions cease. The emancipated

person attains to an altered state of consciousness that is close to "dreamless sleep". Although Buddha, in contradistinction with the Hindu doctrine of *Atma-Brahma*, elaborated his path to *nirvana*, through *anatta* or not-*atma*, yet his way, as a scholar of Buddhism, G.C. Pande, has also observed, "is really the way of Awakening,"[4] not in disaccord with the *Upanishads*. The nirvanic state is preceded by the spiritual progress divided into *Sila*, *Samadhi* and *Panna*. Finally the mendicant comes to the "peaceful state" which according to The *Dhammapada* is "the cessation of natural existence and happiness. "By realizing this state, the enlightened being "illuminates this world like the moon freed from a cloud."[5] Later, in the 2nd century A.D., Nagarjuna, perhaps the greatest interpreter of Buddhism, explained this luminous state of nirvana as shunyata, void, non-being or realization of the co-dependence of the world: *Pratityasamutpada*. The co-dependent knowing that included both understanding and relativist realization of the world, had many possibilities but still it remained at the level of consciousness.

The individual-personal and de-individual impersonal knowing of Hinduism and Buddhism, are still a kind of subjective way of attaining to nirvana, even if that "subject" is not to be understood in the sense of the alienated or dichotomous subject of the Western Platonic-Cartesian tradition.

II

The Sikh gurus are very clear about the various levels of liberation. To them, transformation of the subject's consciousness is only one level although a vital one. For full liberation, change has to occur at several levels. To use the words of Gustavo Gutierrez, the author of *Theology of Liberation*,

these levels are "part of a single salvific process."[6]

The Sikh gurus also understood the problematic of medieval Indian society in not having an up-coming middle class that could organize itself into a revolutionary group to overthrow the mode in which all production centred around the Sultan and his supportive small sections. In Europe the qualitative change could occur because the middle class was aided by the new science, related ideology and educational institutions developed by the king and nobility themselves. The Sikh gurus themselves were from the trading middle class conscious of its limited growth within that Sultan-centred system, yet they were basically stimulated by the plight of the peasantry that especially under the Mughals was ruthlessly exploited, to the extent of losing its two-third produce to the Sultanate and its revenue officials. And above this, the peasant did not have rights to his land.

In the absence of a potential revolutionary middle class that could develop an ideology around a new production system, the only alternative possibility in the Mughal period was to evolve a counter-ideology within the "medieval" or God-centred framework for a group that was to be a mixture of trading sections and peasant although the latter were expected to dominate due to their sheer number and being on the lowest rung, both hierarchically and economically.

The counter-ideology that the gurus evolved several generations, centred around semiotic change. In simple words, they tried to alter certain key signs which could remould the consciousness of deprived sections. The most prominent and affective sign that largely determined the universe for the contemporary subjects was "God". His Unitarian, orderly and incredibly demanding personality touching disciplinarian savagery as projected by the priesthood helping the Mughal emperors aided the absolutist system in keeping its firm control on the masses. The gurus ade-

quately understood how the theological metaphor or sign could be used to shape the unconscious of the people to accept the Sultan-controlled or Emperor-centred system in which individuals and their concerns did not matter much. Along with this theological sign, God, stemming from the Judaic-Christian or Islamic sources and fully exploited by the ruling hierarchy, was another semiotic sub-system that the Brahmanical priesthood used. That was an avtar or a god like Krishna enjoying free play. Or a Rama, a supporter of the caste hierarchy, destroying a Ravana, a scholar with many heads, mainly for being outside the Aryan caste hierarchy and for that reason a demon deserving annihilation. Both the signs, the one used by the Mughal priesthood and the other used by the Brahmanical priesthood, helped in moulding the conscious and unconscious of the people to a mutli-layered subjectness. These two signs, therefore, needed to be altered or replaced by the one or ones that would de-subject or liberate.

The gurus developed the de-subjecting sign, God. Its first liberative feature is that it gets new signifieds or psychological imprints that could make the sign distant from any identity with temporal king. The God of the Sikh gurus is "the true emperor" (*sacha padshah*).[7] His rule never ends. His administrative assistants are those who have attained to the state of "cosmic equipoise" (*sahaj*). In comparison with Him, Guru Nanak says, "all temporal kings, their subjects and set ups are false."[8] He contains in Himself all powers and attributes of the gods like Siva, Mahesh, etc.[9] No Veda, Purana, or any conceptual-philosophical system (*sastra*) is above Him.[10] He remains in an eternal state of tranceful meditation (*tari*). He is the archetypal yogi. Apart from making God the true king in contrast with the false temporal kings, and the Supreme Yogi in contrast with the sectarian yogis fragmenting the people's mind, the gurus also made

Him a rasia, an enjoyer, who participates in the beings of his followers. The fifth guru, Arjun Dev, in a hymn, says that "The Most Radiant has graced my bed and my mind has absorbed into His bliss".[11] This God is not just an abstraction. His thought has not only to be grasped philosophically but also to be realized existentially. This bodily-existential relish of God connects the gurus with the non-Aryan *dehvadin* tradition of Carvaka. The Vedantic system elaborating Brahma as pure and non-dualistic consciousness is different from this bodily-existential emphasis of the gurus.

They wanted to create a new psycho-biology, an altered response system, a radically modified unconscious that would respond to the "order" of the "true," "blissful" lover and yogi; the supreme power that is beyond thought and structuration, beyond the "blood-sucking kings."[12] To experience this God means to the gurus to de-condition oneself, to de-subject from the ideology of the ruling imperial class. Changing the mind and body through the altered sign was their strategy to produce a new person. The gurus understood this well that all ruling elites subject through signs and metaphors. In our times, Foucault, Guattari and Deleuze have very vitally drawn our attention to the ways ideologies are inscribed on the "bodies" or the psycho-biology of the ruled. Liberation is not possible without undertaking the job of deinscibing, which means organizing counter-strategies, both semiotic and socio-political. The true, yogic and bliss-giving God of the Sikh gurus is counter-strategic to demolish the image of an imperial God or of the Sultanate that was oppressive and exploitative.

Another change that the gurus introduced in this theological sign to make it de-inscriptive was in the form of giving it signifieds related to militarization and historicization. In simple words, the God as elaborated by the gurus is combative. He kills demons (*asuras*),[13] and punishes "egotists," i.e., the kings, landlords, and all administrative

i.e., the kings, landlords, and all administrative officials who were "suckers" and ruthless in those days. This God is incredibly assertive and protects his devotees (*bhaktas*), the persons who have realized Him as combative and blissful. The tenth guru, Gobind Singh who baptized and militarized the Sikhs in 1699 A.D. at Anandpur begins his *Bachittra Natak* (The Resplendent Drama) by saluting God as the most deadly sword: "It reduces enemy battalions into pieces. Its power overcomes the battlefield. It is so indestructible that it eternally flashes like the sun, and burns like a self-ignited flame."[14]

The gurus project this demon-wrecking militancy of God in their specific historical context in which they were engaged to transform the society. The tenth guru, in the text cited above, invokes this militancy to narrate the battles that he himself had fought against the rajas of the Shivalik hills. The historicized militancy empowers this sign to yield a new signification alongwith engendering an appropriate psycho-biological energy that not only prepares to understand the dialectical field, but also to seize it to conquer. Charles Morris, one of the founders of modern semiotics is on record for acknowledging this sort of power of signs. He terms it "appropriative" and "consummatory."[15]

By altering the theological sign with the signifieds related to aesthetics and historiosophic militancy, the Sikh gurus aimed at creating a person who could both enrich and enlarge his/her being and also intervene in history. To them, transforming the society or history also meant transforming the I. Such altered beings were named by them as "*gurmukhs*" (mouth-pieces of the guru) or saint-soldiers. Positioned in historical specificity and the most extended consciousness of the divine, these *gurmukhs* were capable of communicating Sabda, the realized energy of the life-system. And this communication was not only to be inter-

personal but also communitarian and institutional. This kind of person who alters by altering himself has been called "historical bloc" by Gramsci. James Joll explains this notion as follows: "By this phrase he (Gramsci) he was trying to describe the moment when both objective and subjective forces combine to produce a situation of revolutionary change, the moment when the economic structure of the old order was collapsing but when there also were people with the will, determination and historical insight to take advantage of this."[16]

The *gurmukh* or the ideal, conscious person, defined by the Sikh gurus, in both liberated and liberating. By God's grace he gets to the "door of liberation", says Guru Nanak in his *Japuji*. But the most vital point to be understood about this person is that he or she remains in cosmic equipoise (sahaj). He is enlightened and he meditates on God's Name that is crudely translated as Name, but actually means His essence that comes into consciousness or whole being through various signifiers or sound impressions of the mind. Thus the radiance and baiance that this *Nam* or various signifiers give are no different from participating in history with an enlightened consciousness. If the essence of God is related to the signifieds of aesthetic and historiosophic militancy, then, remaining with or in Him can lead only to historical action with an extended sense of beauty and its relish.

Such a *gurmukh*, the gurus place in dialectic with the negative person: *manmukh*. As compared to the Sikh guru's hero: *gurmukh*, this negative person is (i) an egotist like the kings, state officials or those who have no control over their greed for money and property, always engaged in petty quarrels;[17] (ii) a betrayer (*lun haram*) who salutes in slavery;[18] (iii) an indulgent who cannot discipline himself in sex, anger;[19] (iv) an enemy of saints or *gurmukhs*;[20] and finally,

(v) a dualist incapable of experiencing the aesthetic and divine relish.[21]

It is obvious that the *manmukh*, in the guru's system, with all these characteristics mentioned above, cannot meditate on God who is aesthetic and historiosophically militant, and for that reason he is unauthentic to intervene in history. For this intervention, integration with truth which in the gurus' writings means identity with *Nam* or the theo-being as elaborated already, is necessary. "The *manmukh*, according to Guru Nanak, "disintegrates in the cosmic cycle and the *gurmukh* remains absorbed into Truth."[22] The notion of integration or disintegration is not just psychological in the *Adi Granth*, but socio-political and cosmic simultaneously.

Retaining authenticity or the capability to intervene historically, means to the gurus losing the sense of human dignity, a sense of human honour. The word used is "*Pat*."[23] It rather surprises that the gurus in those times identified the sense of self-respect in a human being with one's capability of absorbing oneself into a large consciousness, with the theological, aesthetic and transformative aspects of God, and then also with aware action in history.

In the dialectic that the gurus build up between the *gurmukh* and the *manmukh*, they elevate the former and call him "*jivan mukta*" or liberated from this life of cycles. He not only meets the Lord in his "palace" but also celebrates the experience of the Unstruck Melody; the highest experiential/deep consciousness state as accepted by the yogic systems when the experiencer attains to a large and existential consciousness. It is a new ecstatic and participative understanding of life. But the *gurmukh* does not keep the attainment to himself, he also shares. According to the third guru, Amar Das, "a *gurmukh* always communicates searchfully from his mind, and keeps his concentration of the *Nam*."[24]

A very vital aspect of the Sikh system is that the intervening hero does not meet his God simply in his individual consciousness, but in the community, called *Sadh Sangat* which literally means the community of saints. Guru Arjun Dev, in one or his hymns says: "The One who dwells in the interiors of the saint-community is the True."[25] At another place the same guru says: "The transcendental masters of the interior and help me in attaining to an insight, but that changes into celebration with the Most Radiant only when one seeks integration with the community."[26] The *gurmukh*, the gurus' positive transformational hero, is mediated by this collective wisdom. The aesthetics and historiosophic militancy of God that he experiences to enlarge himself and intervene are not products of his own consciousness, they come from the experience and understanding of the community. For that reason, the *gurmukh's* consciousness and action are not subjective. They belong in the category of objectivity even if accompanied by the internal power and concentration. But to be more appropriate, if we can get out of the Western dichotomous terms: subjectivity and objectivity, we can say that this mediated consciousness of the intervening hero is a synthetic and personalized external action in which both self and the other go through change and establish a mutualistic and enriching relationship. The hero who is enlightened to act both through his own effort and mediation by the community, cannot side tack. When he or she interprets history or 'blasts open' its continuum, to use an expression from Walter Bengamin, the entry that he/she makes will remain within the principle of cosmic equipoise (*sahaj*).

The *gurmukh* or the liberation seeking person, as a part of the saint-community, experiences joy or something close to what the French word "*jouissance*" conveys. Both Roland Barthes and Julia Kristeva use it for a kind of joy that involves the body or sucking senses in play or action. Al-

though the *gurmukh's* relish or "*rasa*" is larger and transcendental in a special way, still it is close to "*jouissance*" due to its participatory and intense character. The first guru, Nanak Dev, says that in association with the saint-community, if one celebrates or frolics, it does not lead to any repentance, [27] because the whole activity is not deviant, it is only an aspect of the divine who lives with the community. A special feature of this *gurmukh* and his relationship with the community is that it does not flourish in philosophical abstraction separated from joy and beauty. Heidegger is sore about the disjunction between the path of philosophical abstraction and aesthetics in the West. Even Indian *Vedanta* had lost that integrity. The Sikh gurus kept the relationship between the *gurmukh* and the community not that of a narrow pragmatic but of transaesthetics and relish. The signs *gurmukh* and sadh sangat (saint-community), therefore, cannot be understood with the usual "religious" signifieds in the Western disjunctive sense of Heidegger. Rather, the Sikh hero and his community are closer to Herbert Marcuse's notion of a "revolutionary" who fills out his senses with joy and beauty, and then acts significantly. His intervention acquires a different character – different from the one who has only fed himself on abstraction and philosophy.

Boris Pasternak's main argument in his Nobel-prize winning novel Doctor Zhivago is that a revolution which comes through blood-shed, without existential richness of the revolutionaries, leads to certain reflexes that are hard to check. The passionate and cosmic relationship of Lara and Doctor Zhivago in which both love each other as extended realities is what a revolutionary needs to transform the whole revolutionary enterprise into a humane affair.

The Sikh revolutionary, a *gurmukh*, has to humanize himself/herself through love. Guru Gobind Singh says"

"Only those who love meet God." He calls his revolutionary warfare a "play of love." Love in Sikhism is multi-dimensional. It includes relationships among men, women, community, history, and God. No wonder the metaphor of love is the most predominant one in the writings of all the gurus.

The Sikh contribution to the international theory of revolution is that it can be accomplished and fully realized only by those who have first filled themselves out with love and have relished the divine beauty which means the principle of higher harmony and equilibrium passing through conflict and war. The Sikh revolutionary that way is a cosmic intensifier of this principle. He or she cannot be waylaid by alienated selfhood, senses or intellectual abstraction. Alienation is not the product of technocratic and commodity producing capitalism alone, it also existed in the Sultanate or Emperor-centred medieval Indian society in which despite tribal associations, the common people did not participate in the political processes of life. The social and economic processes were given, without any room for individual and personal fulfilment. By evolving the idea of *Sangat* that becomes the guru and enables the *gurmukh* to utter *Shabda* or experientially mediate on the essences of life including the aesthetic and militant features of God, the guru build up a way of de-alienating and integrating the individual on way to be *gurmukh*.

The major point made so far is that the Sikh thought and practice are neither a mere feeling-oriented mysticism, nor a dogmatic kind of theological system, "systematic theology" as Paul Tillich will say, they are *dharma* in the largest Buddhist sense. The vital signs that the Sikhism has shaped : God, *Sangat, Gurmukh, Manmukh,* have new signifieds. They are all centred around aesthetics, militancy and change. They transmit a consciousness of multidimensional

liberation and lead towards structural changes. Both content and the form of these signs were different. The new signified modified the signifiers also. The God with aesthetic, yogic and militant characteristics, and especially in relation to the other radically modified signs is different from the God used by the priesthood helping the Mughal Sultans, and from the Brahma and other puranic gods used by the Brahmanic priesthood to fragment and subdue the masses.

The Sikh signs, thus, re-order the universe. They create new relationships. The questions posed by them and the answers suggested are different from the contemporary imperial and Brahmanic systems. To use the term of Thomas A. Kuhn, the author of *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, the Sikh thought and practice brought about a "paradigmatic" change that occurs according to him, is accompanied by a paradigmatic re-ordering. For the entire scientific community a new way of asking and answering questions is developed because the old one has ceased to do its job. The Sikh semiotic, that way had a revolutionary stance. Although it used the available concepts and categories, yet it re-related them in new contexts and changed their content and form. The intentions of the Sikh semiotic are hardly "theological" in the accepted sense of the word, they are ultra-liberative. The epistemic cut that this semiotic makes, enables it to alter "the historical perspective of the community that shares it."[28] In fact it has altered the neural processes of the Sikhs. By re-educating them, it has prepared them to respond to the world differently. No wonder that in a Sikh, who is raised on the *bani* (meta-poetry) of the *Adi Granth*, the *Dasam Granth*, and on the related lore and institutions, aesthetics, militancy and the passion for change get combined. An authentic Sikh, saturated with the Sikh and semiotic, can only be a no non-sense revolutionary whose being is filled with beauty : the conception of the best that is

and a relishful and utopian desire to realize the possible. He or she will not be content without victory. Guru Gobind Singh, in a hymn, prays to God: "Bless me to be fearless in the battlefield and be a victor with my ardent will."

NOTES

1. *Webster's Third International Dictionary*, Vol. II (Chicago, etc., 1976), p. 1918.
2. *The Twelve Principal Upanishads*, translated by Dr. E. Roer (Delhi), p. 161.
3. A.B. Keith, *The Religion and Philosophy of the Vedas and Upanishads* (Delhi, Varanasi, Patna, second Indian reprint, 1976), p. 161.
4. G.C. Pande, *Studies in the Origin of Buddhism* (Delhi, Patna, Varanasi, second revised edition, 1974), p. 511.
5. *The Dhammapada*, with introductory essay, Pali text, English translation and notes by S. Radhakrishnan (Madras, eighth impression, 1984), p. 176.
6. Gustavo Gutierrez, "A Theology of Liberation," *Monthly Review*, Vol. 38, January, p. 104.
7. *Adi Granth: Shabdarth* (SGPC, Amritsar, third printing, 1959), p. 17.
8. Ibid., p. 17.
9. Ibid., p. 553.
10. Ibid., p. 555.
11. Ibid., p. 844.
12. Ibid., p. 142.
13. Ibid., p. 30.
14. *Dasam Granth Sahib: Shabdarth*, annotated by Bhai Randhir Singh and Taran Singh (Patiala, 1973), Vol. I, p. 52.
15. Charles Morris, "Signs and the Act," reprinted in *Semiotics*, edited by Robert E. Innis (London, Melbourne, Sydney, Auckland, Johannesburg, 1966), p. 180.
16. James Joll, *Gramsci* (Fontana, 1944), p. 86.
17. *Adi Granth: Shabdarth*, p. 316.
18. Ibid., p. 143.
19. Ibid., p. 950.
20. Ibid., p. 520.

21. Ibid., p. 731.
22. Ibid., p. 939.
23. Ibid., p. 31.
24. Ibid., p. 1059.
25. Ibid., p. 44.
26. Ibid., p. 966.
27. Ibid., p. 1113.
28. Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago, London, 1970), p. ix.

PART SIX

MISCELLANEOUS

10

RELIGION AND SOCIALISM *

Frederic Hastings Smyth

Merely to write the above title is to fly in the face of the religious concepts of a great many people. Because, in the minds of many who count themselves as "religious," only that which is included in the area of a "spiritual" relationship with God, which concerns man's eternal, as distinct from his temporal destiny, and which is therefore indifferent to human judgements (or tastes) in the political and economic ordering of this present life on earth, can be properly allotted to the domain of religion. It is obvious, therefore, that before we proceed we must make clear what we mean by "religion."

In what follows, the religion of which we speak will be that which derives from the Hebrew-Christian tradition. And this religion has from the beginning invariably concerned itself with the affairs of this life. Judeo-Christian re-

* With the rise of liberation theology in the 1970s and 1980s, the question of religion and the Left has formed a central topic of discussion and debate in MR, most notably in a July-August 1984 double issue devoted to the question. This article by Frederic Hastings Smyth, an Episcopalian and author of Manhood into God, was the first piece on the topic in *Monthly Review*, published in the July 1949 issue.

ligion is this-worldly rather than next-worldly.

The ancient Jewish community of Palestine, highly conscious of its social unity in a kinship or "brotherhood," lived under a code of communal law full of economic legislation related religiously to the will of the God of Israel. The Book of Deuteronomy, for example, condemns, under high religious sanction, the exaction of interest on loans of either money or goods: it forbids the grabbing of a neighbour's land by shifting the markings of a drawn boundary it confirms an older law freeing slaves after a fixed period of service; it makes elaborate provision for periodical redistribution of lands in such wise as to prevent the growth of a permanent landed aristocracy and the correlative formation of a dispossessed tenantry or share-cropper class. All such religious laws are intended to legislate, within the political and economic life of this world, a set of human relationship proper to men living in a social unity which can, with correctness and meaningfulness, be described as a "brotherhood." They are founded upon the clearly seen truth that men can be spiritually "brotherly" only within a community so organize and governed that "brotherliness" in material relationship is enforced by the authority of constitutional community law. And this law in all its carefully detailed prescriptions, is gathered together in its great Summary which inseparably links all love of God to a regard for one's fellow men ("neighbours") equal at least to one's regard for oneself. The Founder of Christianity, far from denying this central commandment of the Jewish tradition, confirmed it; but he expanded the obligation to the achievement of human community beyond its historic confines in the Hebrew Nation, to embrace all men of every race and every nation.

Therefore, the religion of the Judeo-Christian tradition is by no means exclusively next-worldly in its immediate emphasis. From earliest Old Testament times, this religion

has not hesitated to "meddle" or "tamper" as some people today would put it, with both politics and economics in order that the principles of "brotherhood" may be realized in the basic order of the human social structure. The very kernel of this religion is to aim at the realization of a communally structured way of life such that individualistic self-seeking shall be replaced and dominated by a system of co-operative human relationships.

In other words, in our religious tradition, no moral or ethical principles are ever put forth as if within an environmental vacuum. And still less, by far do we ever presuppose that the social structure of man's environment shall make it categorically impossible to put religious principles into everyday practice. On the contrary, when we teach men that they should tell the truth, we presuppose an economic structure such that truth-telling will gain its due social and economic advantage in practical business and community esteem. When we teach men that they ought to give freely of their best ideas and skills for the advantage of their fellows, we presuppose a society so ordered in distributive justice that those making such contributions shall unfailingly have their due share of whatever social amenities and wealth may subsequently accrue. In brief, when we teach men that they ought to "love one another," we presuppose a social setup in which communal behaviour – traditionally known as "brotherly love" - shall be constitutionally and legally enshrined. We presuppose a social structure so ordered that, when individuals do actually take their religious precepts seriously and seek to "loose their lives" in the service of their fellow men, do seek to be completely and openly truthful, do seek no material advantages either at the expense of or to the impoverishment of their fellows, they themselves will not be penalized for their so-called "self sacrificing" generosity, but will share justly in the resulting common

good. In "losing their lives" they will genuinely "find them".

It follows that the religious approach to the economic and social problems presented by our developed capitalism is not so much immediately one of moral leadership and of prophetic exhortation (although these can certainly not be absent), as it is one of scientific guidance and of social engineering for the achievement of an order such that religious principles can, at least, be put into practice in every department of life by all who are determined to do so. This does not, of course, mean that all men without exception must be motivated by religious conviction. But it does mean that those who are so motivated must not be flatly impeded, as they are now, by the objective realities of our contemporary capitalist society.

That such impediments now exist can hardly be other than obvious to any thoughtful person. It is absurd, for example, to exhort people to be consistently truthful (an undoubted element in treating others like "brothers") while at the same time permitting our sons and daughters to become advertising agents, radio announcers, or even travelling salesmen within a competitive capitalist structure; for in these areas of activity thorough going truthfulness is penalized, not rewarded. Thus, for "religious" people with "scruples," the practical opportunities for unpenalized truth-telling are narrowed to such relatively unimportant occasions as those of mealtime pleasantries and other non-business interchanges with intimates who will not "give us away" to an outer world which, because of its basic structure, awards profits to individuals in proportion to their skill in manipulating untruths.

It is by virtue of the religious requirement that an economic environment be achieved which will make "brotherly" behaviour possible at every level of activity, that relig-

iously motivated people must now join hands with scientific socialists for the replacement of our competitive, self-seeking economy – an economy which in its very constitution exalts individualist profit-making above every other consideration – by one which seeks to make all production cooperative, one which distributes the profits of industry not on the basis of the private ownership of wealth but on the basis of the needs of all the members of the producing community considered as a whole. Socialism, thus defined, is "brotherly behaviour" made socially constitutional.

There are those who teach that "unselfish" self-giving is sufficiently possible even now within our present capitalist society. Those who believe this belong to that school of thought which imagines that our present economic order – and for that matter, any human order whatever – will be "good" if men as individuals are "good" within it. Now while it is certainly true that no economic order, regardless of how well adapted it may be for the satisfaction of religious motivations, will itself be "good" unless individuals are also "good" within it, it does not follow that individual moral integrity can reform or revise a bad economic order. On the contrary, really consistent religious behaviour within a capitalist order is more likely to destroy it than to improve it. Thus, religious virtues within a social structure which constitutionally contradicts them, are not palliative, but revolutionary.

This possibility of flat contradiction between the behaviour patterns enforced by an economic structure and the moral behaviour demanded by religious conscience is neither generally nor sufficiently perceived. Even the late William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury, clear-sighted as he usually was, drew from the fact that "commerce is one of the factors which brings nations together," the conclusion that "whether in doing so it promotes goodwill or ill, depends

on whether we conduct it right or sinfully." Now, this seems to be correct as a generalization: but it applied to present practice it would take us much further than most people who accept this kind of statement usually realize. Dr. Temple continued, saying, "If you treat as competition for profit what is really cooperation for public service, something is likely to go wrong; but if we treat it for what it is, a great system of cooperation for the general benefit, it will generate goodwill. But if we are self-centered – which is the source of sin – and attend chiefly to our share of our interest in it, it is bound to go wrong in its working and to promote rivalries and enmities."

This type of reasoning, often repeated and assuming many forms, overlooks an obvious difficulty. Unfortunately, our present economic system is so constituted that unless it is "conducted for private profit, "precisely then something is not only "likely," but bound to "go wrong." Our American "way of life," from its foundation up, is so organized that if individuals or groups in significant numbers were suddenly to turn "good," in the sense of conducting their business on the principle of "cooperation" if they consistently behaved as if their only intention were to give themselves in every respect to society, rather than primarily to make a profit, their own enterprises and finally the entire system would collapse. Economic chaos would ensure. Our economy works exactly the other way round; the capitalist slogan has to be: "take care of the profits and communal cooperation will take care of itself." Thus in an anti-religious economy, religiously motivated people are compelled to behave in everyday practice in anti-religious ways: or they are compelled to become revolutionary menaces to the contradictory environmental economy.

Socialism offers a rational escape from this irrational dilemma; for in the socialist economy, individuals can be mo-

tivated by a desire to produce the good and useful things which man's intelligence now enables him to shape from the material resources of creation, not for individual profit, but for the use of the entire community. Socialism makes no paradoxically heroic demands of "unselfishness" upon ordinary individuals; on the contrary, it is an economy so constituted that it will bestow its advantages and rewards upon those who seek to "loose themselves" in the avenues of corporate self-giving which it opens to all. It is an economy in which individuals actually stand to receive most when they behave least as competitively acquisitive beings. In this way, socialism present a scientifically realistic answer to the religious dilemma forced upon us by the nature of capitalism. It is that very "unselfishness" now, all too contradictorily extolled by religious moralists, enshrined for the benefit of everyone in the economic constitution of a social mode of production. A motivation desired by the religious man can thus be made productive in all the practical relationships of life; for socialism permits seeking the good of the whole as a primary aim, while at the same time benefit to the individual follows as a kind of morally secondary, but nonetheless logical, result. Such an economic order can satisfy the religious conscience without at the same time making demands of "unselfishness" so fantastically exaggerated as to overpass the bounds of proper reason. For although it is true that in moments of crisis, the individual, like the soldier in battle, is asked to dismiss all notion of personal reward, such conditions are not looked upon as permanently desirable.

It is true that working to establish a socialist system may, in the immediate present, call for extraordinary sacrifices; but the Law of the Hebrew religion was designed to provide economic and social conditions within which the man who obeyed religious precepts there set forth might see the time when "his generation should be blessed," and

riches and plenteousness would be in his house." And when the Apostle Peter said to Jesus that he and his companions, for the sake of their common struggle and propaganda "had left everything and followed him, what should they have therefore?" the answer was not at all that such an enquiry was religiously irrelevant and somehow showed a morally low point of view, but rather that it was a rational enquiry, and the encouraging reply came: "Everyone who has left houses or father or mother or children or lands for me will receive an hundred-fold; and there is no man who has left house or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the achievement of the kingdom of God [the Biblical name for a social order corresponding constitutionally to the will of God] who will not receive manifold more in this very time." Thus socialism is the contemporary way of following the injunction of Jesus of Nazareth to "seek first a social order of Justice" - to which he added the encouraging assurance that clothing, food, good housing and other amenities of life must, in the very nature of the situation so achieved, "be added unto us" as logical and therefore necessary consequences. For, in diametric opposition to the capitalist slogan just suggested, that of socialism is "take care of continuing communal cooperation and the profits will take care of themselves." The capitalist approach is fairly obviously failing, even on its own terms; the socialist approach gives every indication that it both can and will fulfil its promise.

Another, and perhaps a more specifically religious, criticism which must be levelled at capitalism is that of its wanton wastefulness. A religious man necessarily entertains a deep respect for all material things, as coming from the God he worships and as being part of His creation. A religious man must therefore aim at a careful and well-considered use of this creation, aiming at the conservation of its resources which ought to be exploited for their construc-

tive usefulness and for the benefit of man. But we today, in violent contradiction of this religious care, live in a system of waste beyond comparison. In fact, waste might be called the keystone of the structure of our material existence. Historically, our competitive capitalism, developing over five or six centuries past, has raped God's creation for man's self-regarding profit rather than exploited it intelligently for human use. Nobody who has travelled thoughtfully over our own country but must be saddened by our ruthlessly slashed forests in many an old lumbering area: by the blackened and blighted countryside and streams of our coal mining districts; by our western bad lands, with their fertile topsoil beyond recall because of avaricious and careless use; by our "dust bowl" caused by profit-mongering grain planting during the first world war. All these desolations are but the stigmata of human activity without thought for humanity and its future; without any thought, in fact, beyond the quickly amassed profit for a small minority, and then but for a few fleeting years.

But the evil goes deeper. We even produce for the sake of waste! It is our very aim and purpose to have all our manufactured goods used up as soon as possible, to get them worn out or tossed away long before they have ceased to have utility. One need not multiply examples of this waste thus carefully contrived and socially engineered by the meretricious advertising propaganda showered upon us through every avenue of public expression. The great thing is to get everyone to buy, and then to buy more and more; to buy more and to throw away; to buy beyond all rational need and the possibility of constructive use.

But even these methods of waste do not suffice to drain away what are so quaintly called the products of "overproduction" made possible by present day techniques. We are compelled from time to time during periods of peace to

resort to government support of prices, while many of our citizens cannot buy sufficiently for their needs even at lower prices; and we resort to government subsidy of waste and destruction, especially of foodstuffs, in order to prevent the ruin of our producing farmers and to keep them abreast of other business in the mad scramble for profits. All of this is accompanied by human waste, by so-called "depression" unemployment and the profane discarding of many of our best resources in human being themselves.

At last the problem of "over-production" which wipes out capitalist profits becomes insoluble on a domestic basis and within the framework of international peace. No peace-time waste can be contrived, either through propaganda or subsidy which will solve it. Nations which come to this final crisis do not immediately make open declaration of the sinister plans now deeply maturing for further waste and destruction of their "surplus" manufactured and agricultural goods. At first they being to lend money abroad that other more depressed nations may buy these "surplus" products and drain them away. This can be achieved sometimes through private loans, as after the First World War; or through "Marshall Plans" and E. R. P. bounties, as at present. But finally even these means cannot suffice. Loans and gifts for economic "recovery" slip logically over into rearmament programs both at home and abroad – always, of course, avowedly for the "preservation of peace." Then the time comes when the capitalist world goes in for waste on the grandest and mot satanic scale, with bombs and fire, that a new cycle of profit-making and inflationary production may start another irrational competitive rush.

To a religious man, this is a grave sacrilege. All intelligent men, whether or not they profess any explicit religious faith, must grieve over the dreadful sacrilege of such waste. But religious men ought to be filled with a contrite fear at

this ghastly spectacle of man's desecration of God's created world a world given for man's welfare and not to be exhausted for the competitive profit of a few, nor ruined in the cause of man's subsequent self-destruction.

There is ground for rejoicing that what is probably an entirely new factor has entered the contemporary religious scene. For the first time in history it now dawns upon the religious consciousness that what is called sin does not reside exclusively in the selfish wrong-headedness and perverted wills of individual men. Sin can be enshrined in a social structure, as in our present one, in a way which can vitiate the best intentions of the very saints themselves. Our religious forebears never clearly comprehended this truth, although the laws and precepts of their religion had from the beginning pointed the way to it. This lack of understanding has had disastrous results; for it has caused religious people to come to terms with evil economic arrangements looked upon as somehow fixed and humanly unalterable, perhaps even thought to be sent from God! One way out of this difficulty has been to turn "religion" into mere individualist and private piety and to make it concern a next-worldly one utterly foreign to the Judeo-Christian tradition. But the modern development of scientific socialism opens a new door of hope to all religious people. The fresh and well-grounded assurance that, as Karl Marx put it, men can have a rational part in making their own history, shows us that we need no longer "adjust" ourselves as best we may to an anti-brotherly economic system, but can, instead, mould it, to the end that future history may approach nearer to the requirements of our own basic religious motivations. This is the vast contribution which socialist economics is currently making to the cause of religion.

And in return for this, the religious man can affirm, to the hope of humanity and the confusion of cynical sceptics,

that human nature at its most rational is basically cooperative. However much men's motivations have been misguided and perverted in a non-cooperative (i.e. non-brotherly) and irrational competitiveness, we will come to our full stature as truly rational and truly human beings, will do our finest work and live our most productive lives, when a socialist structure permits us to lay aside as imposed jungle mentality and to realize unimpeded our properly cooperative social selves.

11

RELIGION AND THE LEFT

Cornel West

Notwithstanding the secular sensibilities of most leftist intellectuals and activists, religion permeates and pervades the lives of the majority of people in the capitalist world. And all signs indicate that the prevailing crisis in the capitalist world is not solely an economic or political one. Recent inquiries into the specificity of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, state repression, bureaucratic domination, ecological subjugation, and nuclear exterminism suggest that we need to understand this crisis as that of capitalist civilization. To extend leftist discourses about political economy and the state to a discourse about capitalist civilization is to accent a sphere rarely scrutinized by Marxist thinkers : the sphere of culture and everyday life. And any serious scrutiny of this sphere sooner or later must come to terms with religious ways of life and religious ways of struggle.

In this small essay, I shall pose three crucial questions to contemporary Marxism regarding religion. First, how are we to understand the character and content of religious beliefs and practices? Second, how are we to account for the recent religious upsurges in Latin America, the Middle East, Asia, Africa, Eastern Europe, and the United States? And third, in which ways can these upsurges enrich and enhance – or delimit and deter – the international struggle for human freedom and democracy? In the present historical moment, these queries strike me as inescapable and important.

RELIGION AND MARXIST THEORY

The classical Marxist understanding of religion is more subtle than is generally acknowledged. Crude Marxist formulations of religion as the opium of the people in which the religious masses are viewed as passive and ignorant objects upon which monolithic religious institutions impose fantasies of other-worldly fulfilment reveal more about Enlightenment prejudices and arrogant self-images of petty bourgeois intellectuals than the nature of religion. Contrary to such widespread crypto-Marxist myths about religion, Marx and Engels understood religion as a profound human response to, and protest against, intolerable conditions. For Marx and Engels, religion constituted alienated forms of human cultural practice under circumstances not of people's own choosing. On this view, religion as an opium of the people is not a mere political pacification imposed from above but rather a historically circumscribed existential and experiential assertion of being (or somebodiness) by dehumanized historical agents under unexamined socioeconomic conditions. Marx and Engels characterized religion as alienation not primarily because it is "unscientific" or "pre-modern", but rather because it often overlooks the socioeconomic conditions which shape and mould its expression and thereby delimits human powers and efforts to transform these conditions. In short, the classical Marxist critique of religion is not an a priori philosophical rejection of religion; rather it is a social analysis of and historical judgement upon religious practices.

For Marx and Engels, religion often overlooks the socioeconomic circumstances which condition its expression, principally because the religious preoccupation with cosmic vision, ontological pronouncements on human nature, and personal morality hold at arm's length social and historical analysis. Hence religion at its worst serves as an ideological

means of preserving and perpetuating prevailing social and historical realities and at its best yields moralistic condemnations of and utopian visions beyond present social and historical realities – with few insights regarding what these realities are how to change them. The Marxist point here is not simply that religion alone is an impotent and inadequate form of protest, but also that without a probing and illuminating social and historical analysis of the present even the best-intentioned religionists and moralists will impede fundamental social and historical transformation. In stark contrast to crude Marxists, Marx and Engels do not claim that only a substitution of a rigid Marxist science of society and history for false religion and glib moralism can liberate humankind, but rather that a Marxist social and historical analysis can more effectively guide transformative human praxis motivated, in part, by moral and/or religious norms of human freedom and democracy.

This more nuanced understanding of religion has rarely surfaced in the Marxist tradition, primarily owing to the early Eurocentric development of Marxism. In Europe – where the Enlightenment ethos remained (and still remain) hegemonic among intellectuals and the literate middle classes – secular sensibilities were nearly prerequisite for progressive outlooks, and religious beliefs usually a sign of political reaction. The peculiar expression of critical consciousness in Europe focused on a corrupt and oppressive feudal order which the institutional church participated in, firmly supported, and buttressed. And through the advent of Marxism itself bears traces of this Enlightenment legacy, the deep sense of historical consciousness nurtured and promoted by Marx and Engels led them to understand religious beliefs as first and foremost cultural practices generated from conflictual and contradictory socioeconomic condition, rather than as a historical sets of philosophical arguments. Of course, Kant,

Fichte, and especially Hegel and Feuerbach contributed to such an understanding.

The Marxism of the Second International – with its diverse forms of economic determinism, Kantian moralism, and even left social Darwinism – viewed cultural and religious issues in a crude and reductionist manner. Karl Kautsky's monumental work The Foundations of Christianity (1908) is an exemplary text in this regard. The major anti-reductionist voices in this deterministic wilderness were those of the Italian Marxist Antonio Labriola and the Irish Marxist James Connolly. Lenin and Trotsky indeed undermined the crudity and reductionism of the Second International, but they confined their efforts to the realms of politics and the arts. Neither provided serious and sustained anti-reductionist formulations in regard to ethics and religion. In fact, the Third International remained quite reductionist on such matters.

The centrality of morality and religion loom large in the works of Antonio Gramsci. For the first time, a major European Marxist took with utter seriousness the cultural life-worlds of the oppressed. Though still tied to a rationalist psychology which neglected unconscious impulses, and a revolutionary teleology which uncritically privileged industrial working-class agency, Gramsci highlighted the heterogeneous elements which comprise the cultural ways of life of oppressed people and the fragile, ever-changing character of these elements in response to contradictory socioeconomic circumstances.

Gramsci understood culture as a crucial component of capacity. Like James Connolly before him and Raymond Williams in our own time, Gramsci examined the ways in which cultural resources enabled (and disenabled) political struggle among the exploited and excluded in capitalist societies. While Lukacs disclosed the reified character of contemporary capitalist culture – the way in which processes of commodifi-

cation and thingification permeate bourgeois thought, art, and perception – Gramsci focused on the cultural means by which workers and peasants resisted such reification. While Karl Korsch enunciated his principle of historical specificity – the need to acknowledge the materiality of ideology and the diversity of conflicting social forces in a particular historical moment – Gramsci applied this principle and specified the nature of these conflicting social forces with his complex notions of hegemony and historical biocs.

Ironically, the major figures of so-called Western Marxism were preoccupied with culture – but none was materialist enough to take religion seriously. Whether it was Adorno and Marcuse on the subversive character of highbrow music and poetry, Sartre and Althusser on the progressive possibilities of avantgarde prose and theater, or Benjamin and Bakhtin on the revolutionary potential of film and the novel – all rightly viewed the cultural sphere as a domain of ideological contestation. Yet none highlighted religion as a crucial component of this cultural sphere.

It is important to note that it has been primarily third world Marxists – for whom issues of praxis and strategy loom large – who have confronted the religious component of culture in a serious way. Peru's Jose Carlos Mariategui, China's Mao Tse-tung, and Guinea-Bissau's Amilcar Cabral were trailblazers on such mattes. All three shunned the reductionism of the Second International, eschewed the excessive hostility toward religion of the Third International, and transcended the Enlightenment prejudices of the Western Marxists. Mariategui, Mao, and Cabral – whose cultural concerns inspire black Marxists, feminist Marxists, gay and lesbian Marxists in the first world – recovered and refined the classical Marxist insights regarding the materiality and ambiguity, the relative autonomy and empowering possibilities of cultural and religious practices by grasping and existential and experiential

content of such practices under capitalist conditions. In our own time, such Marxist historians as Christopher Hill and E.P. Thompson in England, W.E.B. Du Bois and Eugene Genovese in the United States, Marc Bloch and Henri Lefebvre in France, Manning Clarke in Australia, and Enrique Dussel in Mexico have begun to come to terms with the complex relation of religious practices to political struggle. In other words, the age of crude Marxist reductionist treatments of religion – along with the European secular condescending attitudes which undergird them – is passing. Concrete social and detailed historical analyses of the relation of religion to revolutionary praxis is now a major issue on the agenda for contemporary Marxism.

RELIGION AND MARXIST POLITICS

The fundamental challenge of religion for Marxist politics is how we should understand religious practices as specific forms of popular opposition and/or subordination in capitalist societies. Recent religious upsurges around the world – in post-industrial, industrial, and pre-industrial capitalist countries – call into question bourgeois theories of secularization and crude Marxist theories of modernization. The world-historical social processes of rationalization, commodification, and bureaucratization have generated neither a widespread "dis-enchantment with the world", a "polar night of icy hardness and darkness", nor a revolutionary class consciousness among industrial workers. Instead, we have witnessed intense revivals of nationalism, ethnicity, and religion. Modern capitalist processes indeed have transformed traditional religious worldviews, intimate Gemeinschaft-like arrangements, and customary social bonds; but these processes have not eliminated the need and yearning for such worldviews, arrangements, and bonds. Recent nationalist, ethnic, and reli-

gious revivals constitute new forms of these worldviews, arrangements, and bonds, with existential intensity and ideological fervor.

There are three basic reasons for this. First, the culture of capitalist societies has, for the most part, failed to give existential moorings and emotional assurance to their inhabitants. The capitalist culture of consumption – with its atomistic individualism, spectatorial passivity, and outlooks of therapeutic release – does not provide meaningful sustenance for large numbers of people. So in first world countries, religious responses – often in nostalgic forms but also in utopian ones – are widespread. Given the relative lack of long-standing ties or traditional links to a religious past, these responses are intertwined with the prevailing myths of European modernity : nationalism, racism, anti-Semitism, sexism, anti-Orientalism and homophobia. This is why religious (as well as nationalist and ethnic) revivals are usually dangerous – though they also are significant in that religious impulses are one of the few resources for a moral and political commitment beyond the self in the capitalist culture of consumption. These impulses often require commitments to neighbour, community, and unknown others – though such commitments are ideologically circumscribed.

The second reason religious revivals emerge is that they constitute popular responses to intense capitalist domination of more traditional societies. This is especially so in third world countries in which the cultural forms are either indigenous or colonial and the capital is primarily external or international. The boom-town character of industrialization, urbanization, and proletarianization demands that cultural ways of life, usually religious, provide strategies for new personal meaning, social adjustment, and political struggle.

The emergence of the most important third world development in religious practices – the liberation theology

movement – consists of such strategies of new personal meaning, social adjustment, and political struggle. This movement began in Latin American primarily in response to rapid capitalist penetration, quick yet painful industrial class formation, rampant state repression, and bloated urbanization. This response was not only rooted in Christian thought and practice, it also flowed from the major "free" space in these repressive regimes, the church. And given the overwhelming Roman Catholic character of this movement – with the monumental reforming impetus of Vatican II (1962-65) and the ground-breaking counter-hegemonic posture of the Medellin Latin American Bishops' meeting (1968) – these new strategies became more open to personal meanings, social adjustments, and political struggles informed by prophetic elements in the Scriptures and ecclesiastical tradition as well as progressive social and historical analyses.

Liberation theology in Latin America – embodied in the works of Gustavo Gutierrez, Reubem Alves, Hugo Assmann, Jose Miguez-Bonino, Victorio Araya, Ernesto Cardenal, Paulo Freire, Elsa Tamez, Jose Miranda, Pablo Richard, Juan Luis Segundo, Enrique Dussel, Beatrice Couch, and others – is generated and sustained by popular religious opposition to the consolidation of capitalist social processes in Latin America. It is, in part, an anti-imperialist Christian mode of thought and action. Similar liberation theology outlooks – with their own contextual colorings – are found in Africa (especially South Africa), Asia (especially the Phillippines and South Korea), the Caribbean (especially Jamaica), and the United States (especially among blacks and feminists). Yet in terms of widespread concrete praxis, none yet rivals that of Latin America.

The last reason such religious revivals emerge is that they constitute anti-Western forms of popular resistance to capitalist domination. This is especially so in those third

world countries (or pockets in the first world, as with indigenous peoples) in which a distinct cultural and religious way of life still has potency and vitality compared to Western modes of religion. For example, in the Middle East and parts of Asia and Africa, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, or traditional religions still have substance and life. Hence these religions serve as cultural sources against not simply Western imperialism but also much of Western civilization – especially Western self-images, values, and sensibilities. Such resistance, life all forms of resistance, can be restorative and reactionary (as in Iran) or progressive and prophetic (as among many Palestinians).

In short the religious revivals, along with nationalistic and ethnic ones, fundamentally result from the inability of capitalist civilization to provide contexts and communities wherein meaning and value can be found to sustain people through the traumas of life. And since there can be no potent morality without such contexts and communities, these religious revivals represent an ethical challenge to Marxism. Instead of the promised autonomy and progress of the European Enlightenment, the modern West has bequeathed to the world – besides ingenious technological innovations, personal liberties for some, and comfortable living for the few – mere fragments and ruins of a decaying and declining civilization. This decay and decline owes much to the captivity of its ways of life to class exploitation, patriarchy, racism, homophobia, technocratic rationality, and the quest for military might. Of course, many of these remarks – and even more so in the realm of personal liberties – can be made of "actually existing socialist" civilization. But our focus here in the capitalist world. And as this capitalist world continues its deterioration, religious revivals will more than likely persist. The great question is: Will such revivals enable or disenable the left in its struggle for human freedom and democracy?

RELIGION AND MARXIST STRATEGY

Religious upsurges in the third world (and second world, as in Poland) may quite clearly contribute to the building of a left movement. As we have seen in Latin America – where over 200,000 base Christian communities exist as concrete praxis-centers for social change, communal support, and personal sustenance – and parts of Africa and Asia, religion plays an important role in liberation struggles. The prophetic church in Nicaragua, with its tensions (both healthy and unhealthy) with the state, is the best recent example of this crucial role.

The major contribution religious revivals can make to left strategy is to demand that Marxist thinkers and activists take seriously the culture of the oppressed. The fundamental shift in the sensibilities and attitudes of Marxists requires a kind of de-secularizing and de-Europeanizing of Marxists praxis, a kind of laying bare and discarding of the deep-seeded Enlightenment prejudices that shape and mould the perspectives and perceptions of most Marxists. This shift does not demand a softening of critical consciousness but rather a deepening of it. It does not result in an anti-science stance but rather in anti-scientism (the idolizing of science). It does not yield an anti-technology view-point but rather an anti-technologism. Nor does it produce a rejection of reason but rather a specifying of liberating forms of rationality.

Such a shift is necessary because after over a century of heralding the cause of the liberation of oppressed peoples, Marxists have little understanding and appreciation of the culture of these people. This means that though Marxists have sometimes viewed oppressed people as political or economic agents, they have rarely viewed them as cultural agents. Yet without such a view there can be no adequate conception of the capacity of oppressed people the capacity to change the world and sustain the change in an emancipatory manner. And

without a conception of such capacity, it is impossible to envision, let alone create a socialist society of freedom and democracy. It is, in part, the European Enlightenment legacy – the inability to believe in the capacities of oppressed people to create cultural products of value and oppositional groups of value – which stands between contemporary Marxism and oppressed people. And it is the arrogance of this legacy, the snobbery of this tradition, which precludes Marxists from taking seriously religion, a crucial element of the culture of the oppressed.

Needless to say, shedding the worst of the Enlightenment legacy does not entail neglecting the best of this European tradition. Relentless criticism and historical consciousness remain the crucial ingredients of any acceptable emancipatory vision – just as protracted class struggle and an allegiance to socialist democracy remain indispensable features of any recognizable Marxism. So the call for an overcoming of European bourgeois attitudes of paternalism toward religion does not mean adopting religious viewpoints. Religious affiliation is neither the mark of ignorance nor intelligence. Yet it is the mark of wisdom to understand the conditions under which people do or do not have religious affiliation. In this sense, science neither solves nor dissolves the issue of religious beliefs. Instead history provides us with tradition against which we must struggle yet in which we must critically abide. The grand quest for truth is a thoroughly historical one which takes the form of practical judgments inseparable from value judgments upon, and social analytical understandings of, prevailing socioeconomic realities There indeed are standards of adjudication, but such historically constituted standards include multiple viewpoints worthy of adoption. Hence, the quest for truth continues with only human practice providing provisional closure.

If Marxists are to go beyond European bourgeois attitudes toward the culture of the oppressed, without idealizing or romanticizing these cultures, it is necessary to transcend a her-

meneutics of suspicion and engage in hermeneutical combat.[1] In other words, Marxists must not simply enact negative forms of subversive demystification (and, God forbid, more bourgeois forms of deconstruction!), but also positive forms of popular revolutionary construction of new personal meanings, social adjustments, and political struggles for human freedom and democracy. These new forms can emerge only after traversing, transforming, and building upon the crucial spheres in society – religion, family, labour process, state apparatuses – in order to consolidate and unite multiple organizational groupings for fundamental social change.

So to take seriously the culture of the oppressed is not to privilege religion, but to enhance and enrich the faltering and neglected utopian dimension of left theory and praxis. It is to believe not simply in the potential of oppressed peoples but also to believe that oppressed people have already expressed some of this potential in their actual products, their actual practices. To be a person of the left is not only to envision and fight for a radically free and democratic society; it is also to see this society-in-the-making as manifest in the abilities and capacities of flesh-and-blood people in their struggles under conflictual and contradictory socioeconomic conditions not of their own choosing. This is the fundamental message regarding the relation of religious practices to a revolutionary praxis beyond capitalist civilization. And this special double issue of Monthly Review – initiated by its wise and courageous editors – is an effort at such an audacious yet propitious undertaking.

Courtesy : *Monthly Review*

1. Hermeneutics is a branch of theology dealing with the explanation and interpretation of biblical texts. Ed.